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5 February 2004
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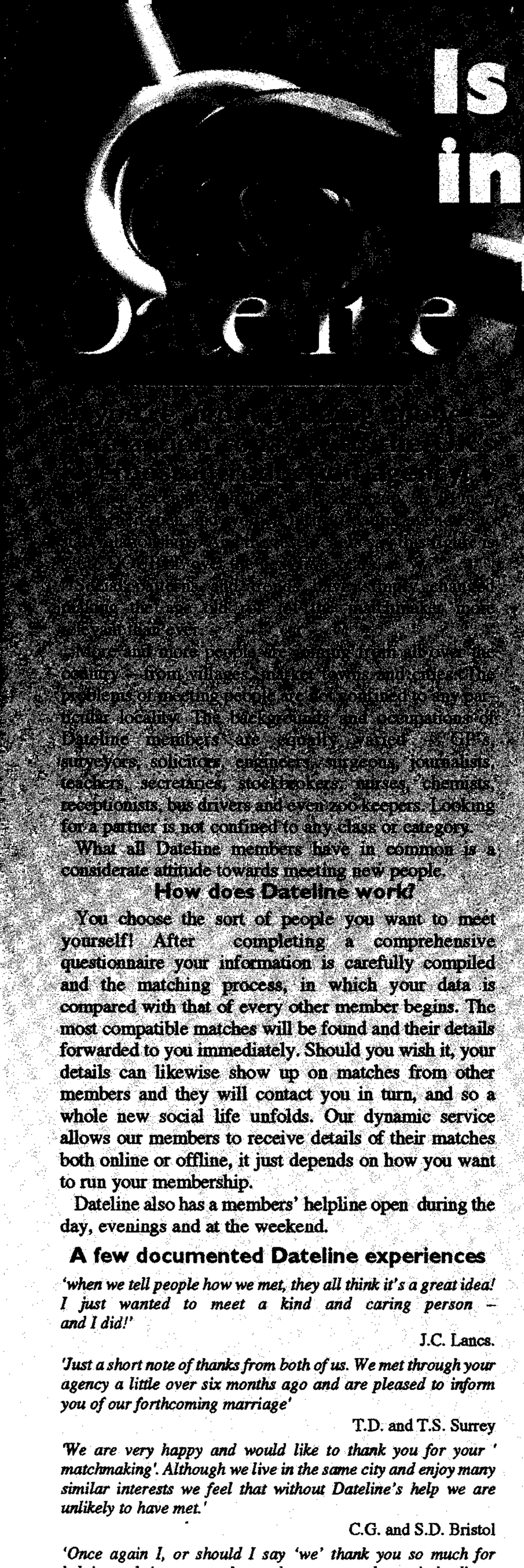
PRIVATE EYE

BLAIR ANSWERS CRITICS



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E.O. Roxburghshire

'I'd just like to thank Dateline for helping me find the man of my dreams!'

L.D. Northants

"I believe that we have found exactly what we both have wanted and searched for and never really thought we would find."

R.M. Northants

'My life seems so wonderful now and we both feel so lucky to have met one another. I hope other members have someday the same happiness that I have.

L.B. Dundee

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Your Details

Mr ❒ Mrs ❒ Ms ❒

Surname:

First Name:

Address:

Post Code:

Tel No:

E-mail:

Marital Status:

❒ Single ❒ Divorced

❒ Widowed ❒ Separated

Membership restricted to ages 18+ only

Age: Height:

Occupation

Religion:

Build: Attractiveness:

❒ Slight ❒ V. Attractive

❒ Medium ❒ Attractive

❒ Large ❒ Average

Your Personality

tick which traits closely describe you

❒ Affectionate ❒ Fashionable

❒ Serious ❒ Practical

❒ Considerate ❒ Conventional

❒ Shy ❒ Reliable

❒ Romantic ❒ Adventurous

Your interests

Please tick for a liking,cross for a dislike or leave blank for no pref.

❒ Wining/Dining ❒ Jazz/Folk music

❒ Pubs ❒ Classical music

❒ Sports/Keep fit ❒ Theatre/Arts

❒ Politics/History ❒ Watching TV

❒ Reading ❒ Smoking

❒ Travelling ❒ Mixing with friends

❒ Science/Tech ❒ Children

❒ Cinema ❒ Homemaking

❒ Pets/Animals ❒ Gardening

❒ Pop music ❒ Countryside

Your Attitudes

tick for yes, cross for no or leave blank if you don't feel strongly

❒ I prefer town life

❒ I involve myself in community activities

❒ I have many friends of my own sex

❒ I am interested in current affairs

❒ I am looking for one special relationship

❒ I like team activities

❒ My work makes it difficult to meet new people

❒ I want to extend my social life as well as finding a special relationship

Your Ideal Partner

Min. age: Max. age:

Height: min. max.

❒ Don't mind

Marital Status:

❒ Single ❒ Divorced

❒ Widowed ❒ Separated

❒ Don't mind

Build: Attractiveness:

❒ Slight ❒ V. Attractive

❒ Medium ❒ Attractive

❒ Large ❒ Average

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Gnome

TODAY is a sad day for Britain. The loss of myself as the world's greatest newspaperman is a blow to western civilisation from which it may never recover.

Great men have always had to put up with jealous petty-minded Lilliputians seeking to bring them down. One thinks of Napoleon Bonaparte, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Robert Kilroy-Silk and myself. And for why? A man of my genius was fully entitled to private jets, large houses and vast quantities of cash as a reward for inspirational leadership. Similarly the same is true of Lady Sharona Gnome who tirelessly worked to build up one of the world's finest collection of shoes (outside of the Philippines).

For the shareholders of the Bollinger Group to claim that this money was in someway theirs is to display a fundamental misunderstanding of the capitalist system in general and the newspaper industry in particular. Ingrates! Hypocrites! Bastards!

It is with great sadness that I therefore pen you this final missive before beginning my journey into exile on St Elba. But I shall return. Courage mes braves et bon chance!

Lord Napoleon Gnome,
The Old Asylum, Waterloo.

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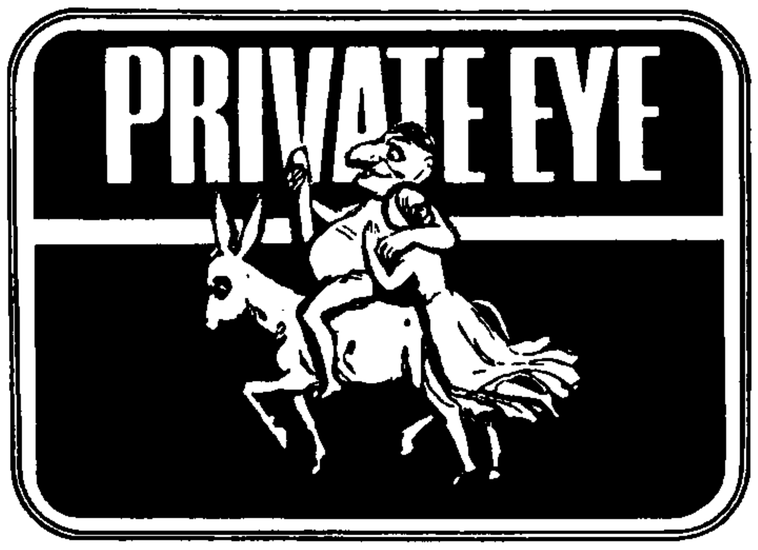

HOW KIND of Tony Blair to choose LBC for his "Big Conversation" phone-in last week, thus boosting listener figures and raising the profile of London's seventh biggest commercial radio station. LBC's owner Chris Wright must be delighted.

By happy coincidence, the selfsame Chris Wright donated £100,000 to "new" Labour in 1999, and signed a letter to the *Times* just before the 2001 election urging fellow-tycoons to vote for the Dear Leader.

IS THE NHS safe in the health secretary's hands?

At a recent newspaper lunch, John "Oh fuck, not health" Reid boasted that he "would sort out the NHS" in the same way he had "sorted out Northern Ireland".

"It's barbaric the way they axe their TV presenters"

THE department of health's latest weapon in the war on obesity is "Your Life!", a glossy celeb-packed magazine which will be given away free in cinemas, cafes and gyms.

It features advice on diets and exercise from such medical authorities as Ms Dynamite and Chris Eubank. The magazine was launched on 19 January – just two days after Eubank made his debut in TV adverts as… the new face of McDonald's!

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Public relations guru Lord Bell has been parachuted in to try to defuse the crisis threatening to engulf Lord Black and his Hollinger group, which owns the *Daily Telegraph* and *Spectator* magazines… Lord Bell said the most important part of the ongoing brief will be changing the 'incorrect assumption' that Hollinger International's *Telegraph* titles are up for sale. 'The assumption that the *Telegraph* titles are available for sale is not true'." — *Media Guardian* online, 4 December 2003.

"Lord Black's near 20-year reign at the *Telegraph* looks to be over today after the Barclay Brothers announced a £259m deal to buy him out of the holding company that controls the British broadsheet." — *Media Guardian* online, 18 January 2004.

IN a brilliant PR coup designed to attract more young people to gameshooting, the Christmas double edition of *Shooting Times* offered children and teenagers the chance to win a day's shooting with, er, Vinnie Jones.

The head-stamping, nose-biting, testicle crunching footballer turned cinema hardman and persistent offender had, only two weeks earlier, admitted an air rage incident in which, while slapping a passenger around the head and promising to "eat his face", he had threatened to have an air crew murdered for £3,000. All this in front of terrified passengers, including children.

Jones was fined and ordered to do 80 hours' community service. After a reminder to Hertfordshire police from the charity Animal Aid, he also had his shotgun licence taken away.

"That'll be £30,000"

FROM "Bonkers Bruno Locked Up" to "Ship Ship Hooray", Rebekah Wade's *Sun* is the home of the inappropriate headline.

But her team surpassed itself on 15 January, less than a week after police announced that no footballer would face charges after the "roasting" incident at the Grosvenor hotel.

A report by health editor Jacqui Thornton on an "orgasm machine" available in the USA carried the banner headline "It was like having sex with a whole football team."

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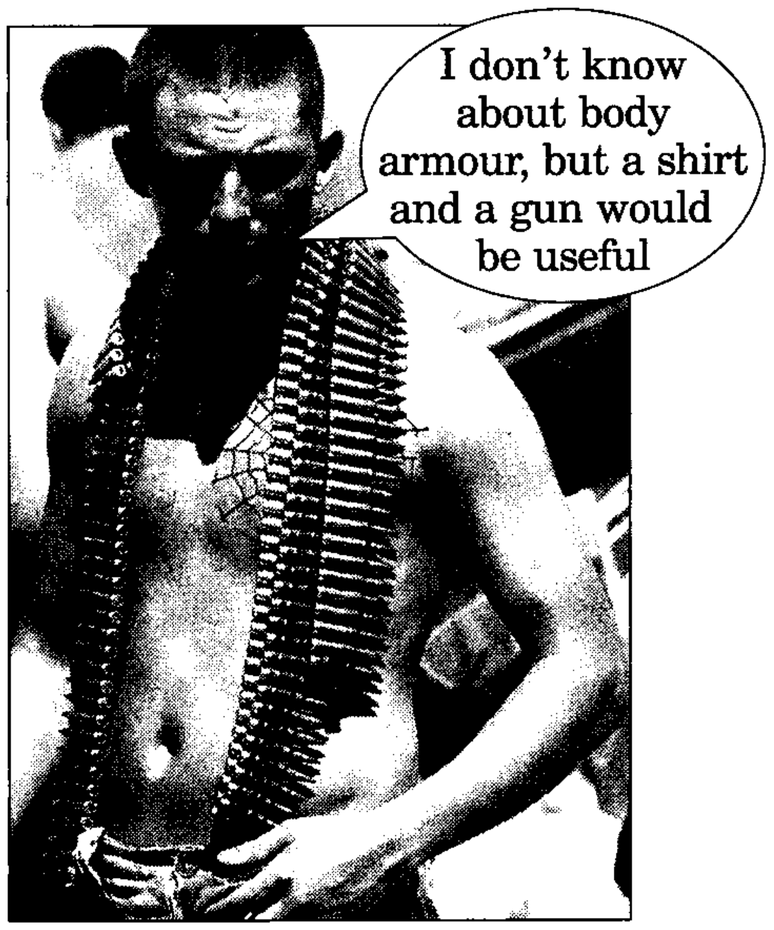
NEW ARMY SHOCK



Street Of Shame

"WE believe this continued media controversy is significantly harming the public image and stock price of Hollinger International," the Barclay twins wrote in their letter to Hollinger directors last weekend. "As part of the acquisition, the negative media attention should cease."

But won't the Barclays' higher profile arouse the curiosity of rivals as to where exactly all their money came from? Isn't the *Guardian* already setting its investigative hacks – led by that tireless sleuth David Leigh – on the case?

Er, perhaps not. The Barclays have been on surprisingly fond terms with the *Grauniad* ever since the mid-1980s when they approached the paper's then op-ed editor, the same David Leigh, and suggested he should support their campaign against the feudal system on the Channel Island of Sark, which they were challenging in the courts.

Sark, David Barclay explained, had sexist laws of primogeniture and a government run by an unelected seigneur, besides being a haven for international tax evasion – enough to make any *Guardian* person's blood boil.

Sure enough, the *Grauniad* took up the cause, giving frequent and sympathetic coverage to the twins' noble crusade against feudalism, even running a feature by the normally silent David Barclay himself. So perhaps he has at least some reason to think there will now be less "negative" coverage of Hollinger.

HOW ON earth did Kilroy-Silk's infamous Arab column get into print?

The answer lies in the fact that copy at the *Sunday Express* is not handled like that on other papers: since porn-baron Richard Desmond took over, much of the down-table sub-editing has been shifted to Broughton in Lancashire, at the paper's printing works. This means that many of the staff responsible for rewriting contributors' work and providing headlines work more than 200 miles away from the editor, may not even have met him, and are far less likely to bring problems to his attention. Besides, they are so used to recycling material between Desmond's various organs – the same pieces are often shared between the *Star*, *Express* and even *OK!* – that there is an air of weary familiarity to much of the stuff they handle. Hence, they failed to spot that Kilroy's piece had already appeared nine months previously.

That editor himself, however, has no excuse. A few days after the Kilroy row erupted, Martin Townsend pronounced himself "comfortable standing by the column, because I believe passionately that he has the right to free speech". But he has so far failed to explain why he doesn't bother to read it.

IN A magisterial pre-Hutton editorial, the *Sunday Telegraph* rebukes the BBC for its journalistic shortcomings. "Mr Gilligan's bosses at the *Today* programme should have insisted on due diligence – normal journalistic checks, in other words – before broadcasting," it opines.

Who better to deliver such a lecture than the paper which last year ran a front-page photo of someone alleged to be Lord Lucan, though a moment's "due diligence" would have identified him as a Lancastrian folk singer called Jungly Barry? And which had to grovel to Nicole Kidman after wondering why more papers hadn't branded her "a homewrecker", apparently unaware that she was suing the *Sun* and *Daily Mail* for this very allegation? And which paid large damages to Mohamed Fayed after running a ludicrous story linking him to an operation to smuggle uranium to Osama bin Laden, even though several hacks had warned editor Dominic Lawson that there was no evidence?

WHILE the *Guardian* continues its high-minded campaign against university tuition fees, hacks on the paper's education section are not averse to fleecing students themselves.

Aspiring hacks on the *Oxford Student* newspaper have for some time been happily handing over tip-offs to *Guardian* hack Polly Curtis, herself plucked from Leeds university after victory in the paper's Student Media Awards three years ago. Unfortunately last week Ms Curtis hit the wrong button on her email and dispatched a message intended for her boss to Anjool Malde, a student at St Peter's College, Oxford – "Anjool may be a wanker but I think it justifies ruthlessly exploiting him by stealing his stories."

Malde promptly forwarded the email to the *Mirror*, announcing that "all ties are broken" and that the *Guardian* is "well out of order," and the paper duly ran a series of gleeful stories about the affair. But a glance at the 19-year-old's website, www.anjool.co.uk, suggests he is not averse to a bit of exploitation himself. As well as work he has had done for the *Guardian* and BBC, the student also publishes "over 75 free Grade A essays, resources and revision notes mainly provided by ex-students of Egglescliffe School... intended for those taking AS & A-Levels... 100% free content".

Naturally there are the usual disclaimers that the work is "intended for guideline use, not for coursework cheating", but the site might make an interesting feature for a publication like, say, Education Guardian.

"Can I write about you writing about me in your column in my column?"

THE only entertaining feature in the *Financial Times* is the "Martin Lukes" column, in which Lucy Kellaway satirises management-speak through the fictional internal emails at a multinational called A-B Global whose bosses disguise mass sackings and pay-freezes in the language of caring and sharing.

What makes it all the more appealing to *FT* hacks is the uncanny similarity between A-B Global and their own parent company, the Pearson Group.

On 5 January Pearson supremo Dame Marjorie Scardino sent a new year message to all her staff warning of tough times ahead, and concluding in characteristic fashion: "For me, one particular thing about Pearson consistently, year after year, makes everything worthwhile – all of you. While we may not have shaken hands or looked each other in the eye in person, I have a lot to be thankful for because I get to come to work every morning knowing that you're coming to work too, and likely to do something miraculous that day."

Three days later, the "Martin Lukes" column included the following message from the chief executive of A-B Global: "As I came into work this morning I philosophised about the multitude of things we have to be uniquely thankful for. Top of my list was each and every one of you… For 2004 this must be our resolution: to harness our values to unleash a miracle every day..."

And so it went amusingly on, but editor Andrew "Tubby" Gowers somehow failed to spot the resemblance until after the column appeared, whereupon he dished out furious bollockings all round and a stern warning that Kellaway's column must be closely invigilated from now on. If Dame Marje ever happened to notice that her own newspaper was ridiculing her, who knows what might happen to poor Tubby?

"AN American doctor who claimed that a woman may be about to conceive the world's first cloned baby sparked angry protests yesterday," the *Sunday Express* reported last weekend.

One of the protests, no doubt, came from the *Sunday Express*'s legendary investigative hack Gordon Thomas (see *Eyes passim*), who might justifiably wonder why anyone thought this newsworthy. Back in May 2002 Thomas published an exclusive headed "Gaddafi's Clone due in Autumn", which revealed that "the world's first baby clone – a boy due to be born in November – will be the biological replica of Colonel Gaddafi." The baby had been created with the aid of Italian fertility specialist Professor Severino Antinori.

This history-making tot must by now be more than a year old, which makes the latest stories about the imminent conception of "the world's first cloned baby" seem utterly ignorant and outdated.

Unless, of course, Thomas's story was a banquet of bollocks. But that is surely unthinkable

RICHARD "Dirty" Desmond has had a little local difficulty in Spain, where his porn mags are printed by Polestar Espanica, whose British sister company Polestar UK prints the *Daily* and *Sunday Express* magazines.

Over Christmas a consignment of Dirty Des's filth was dispatched by lorry from Madrid but never arrived in the UK. Thousands of copies of *Asian Babes* and suchlike appeared to have simply vanished. So the mags were hastily reprinted by the Spanish and sent off at top speed.

It then transpired that the original lorry had been impounded by customs officers at the French-Spanish border. Searching below the piles of porn they had allegedly found large packages of drugs.

Of course there is no suggestion Dirty Des knew his mucky mags were being used as cover for an altogether different operation. But it leaves him with the problem of what to do with the extra batch of smut that was printed before the original cargo turned up. Watch out for a traditional Desmond cover-replacement scam, whereby in a few weeks those same tits and bums will reappear – neatly re-covered, so to speak.

SHOULD the *Mirror*'s 3am column be renamed "3 Months Ago"? On 19 January the gossip-witches offered a hot scoop as their lead story: "We can't imagine what secrets were stored on it but we hear that when the beautiful Leonardo DiCaprio lost his digital camera at throbbing Hollywood nightspot Shelter last week, he made frantic attempts to get it back. Desperate Leo, 29, even offered a $20,000 reward for its safe return."

Well, yes – except that the incident in question happened last November, when it was widely reported in the American press, *Heat* magazine and, er, the *Independent on Sunday*. But the fact that the actor has long since given the camera up for gone did not stop the 3AM "girls" getting 400 words out of it.

"IT IS time for a crackdown on thugs," announced *The Express* in its leader column on 3 January. "Home Secretary David Blunkett must ensure that a much tougher stance is taken by both the police and the courts so that offenders are caught and locked up. Only then will terrorising yobs get the message that their law-breaking will not be tolerated."

Who says the judiciary doesn't listen? Just six days after these words appeared, Croydon crown court sentenced a man who attacked and bit a drinker in a south London wine bar to 14 months in prison. Unfortunately for the *Express*, the man in question was its football editor Rob Shepherd, the author of countless pieces demanding tougher penalties for soccer hooligans since he joined the paper in 1997.

WHAT's the best thing to do if your first anniversary in a new job is marked by news that you have managed to shed 5 percent of your readership? For Rebekah Wade, editor of the *Sun*, the answer is to revisit your greatest hits.

"'Fat, Jealous' Clare Brands Page 3 Porn", was the headline over the first of 11 articles in three days which were the *Sun*'s (over)reaction to off-the-cuff remarks MP Clare Short made at a lunch in Westminster. The piece was illustrated by a mocked-up pic of Short's head on a topless model's body, which rather contradicted the adjacent opinion of "top glamour girl Nicola, 21, from London" that the MP was "fat and ugly".

The following day's five pages of coverage evened things up when Short's head was stuck on an obese body, beneath the headline "Short On Looks, Short On Brains" – an almost word-perfect re-run of the paper's coverage in 1986, when Short attempted to introduce the Indecent Displays (Newspapers) Act to parliament, and editor Kelvin Mackenzie devoted page after page to detailing just how unattractive she was.

But the sentiments were not all that was familiar to Sun readers. The original mock-up of a topless Short had itself had a previous airing, to celebrate the MP's resignation from the cabinet last May along with the message that "frumpy Clare needs to lighten up" from "Page 3 idol Nicola".

What a shame for Wade that News International's picture department cannot come up with any pictures of Short's real breasts. But not for want of trying. Back in 1991 the *Sun*'s sister paper the *News of the World* was one of the first papers to fall foul of the youthful press complaints commission, when it offered £5,000 to Short's ex-husband for any pictures he might have of his wife topless (they eventually settled for a snap of her in a nightdress). The PCC ruled the intrusion "indefensible", and forced the paper to run an unprecedented full-page apology.

THE *Sun*'s desperate headline "SHIP SHIP HOORAY" to mark the suicide of serial killer Harold Shipman (*ship*man, *geddit*?) had a familiar ring to it.

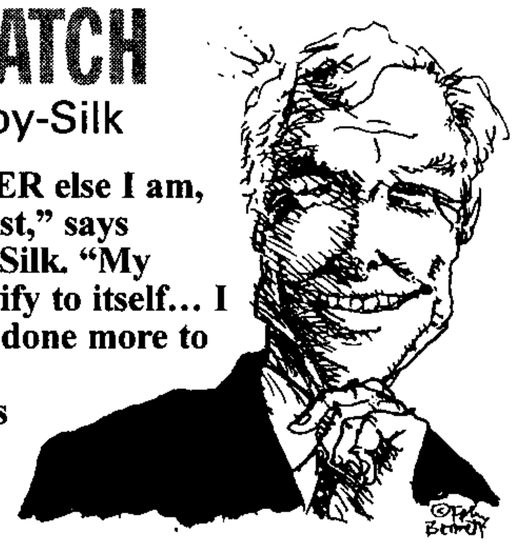
Lazy subs at the red-top get it out and dust if off every few months – they used it four times in 2003 alone – though usually to liven up stories about ships.

In March, May, July and August last year they wheeled it out to describe the Sir Galahad arriving in Iraq, the number of Brits taking cruises nowadays, the fact that Dame Julie Andrews named a new cruise-liner and the fact that an RAF troup carrier was called Largs Bay. How natural then to use the same headline to announce the death of a homicidal psychopath. Ship Ship Hooray for the Sun.

Experienced Muslim Butcher Wanted
To deal with cutting meat and also customers and cash.
Advertisement, The Times

HACKWATCH

Robert Kilroy-Silk



"WHATEVER else I am, I am not a racist," says Robert Kilroy-Silk. "My record will testify to itself... I probably have done more to improve race relations in this country than any other single institution."

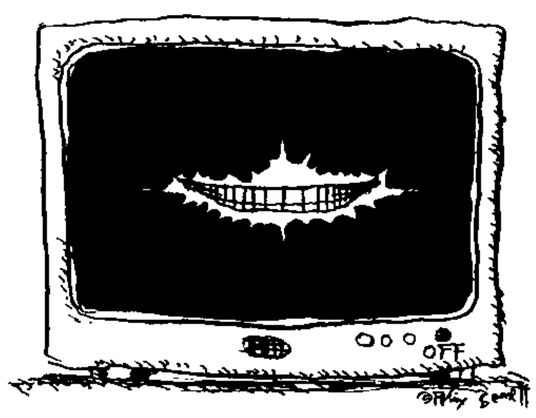
Tragically few people are aware of this heroic record, however, since scarcely anyone reads the *Sunday Express* – not even the paper's own editors, who printed his recent piece about Arabs without noticing that it had already appeared last April. His efforts to promote racial harmony deserve a wider audience, and Lord Gnome is happy to oblige. Here are Kilroy's thoughts on...

The English. Don'tcha love 'em? "Now that the fabulous victory of the English rugby team has rekindled, or rather demonstrated, the depth of English national pride, we must never let it be repressed again," Kilroy declares (14 December 2003). "It is time that we English... stopped allowing ourselves to be put upon. We are beginning to find ourselves. We must now make ourselves heard."

The Irish. In 1992 the *Daily Express* apologised for printing a Kilroy column which described Ireland as "a country peopled by peasants, priests and pixies". (9 Nov 1992.) He has been wary of going public on the subject ever since, though a couple of years ago his *Sunday Express* column included a swipe at "no-mark countries such as Belgium and Ireland" (28 Jul 2002) – "no-mark" being a favourite Kilroy expression of contempt.

The Scots. No better than the Irish. "The Scots suffer from a bit of an inferiority complex when it comes to the English," Kilroy reveals (19 May 2002). "Scotland is dying," he adds. "Between a quarter and a third of its graduates escape every year, mostly to England!... They cannot bear to live in their own country" (9 Mar 2003).

Pakistanis. "Here we go again," Kilroy sighs. "The minister responsible for defining the British identity, Michael Wills, still obviously feels the need to pander to the multicultural lobby, even at the cost of making himself look ridiculous. He solemnly proclaimed: 'The essence of being British is that you can be British and Pakistani, British and Scottish, British and Geordie.' What a dumbhead... Will someone please inform him that Scots are British, that Geordies are British, but that Pakistanis are not. They're Pakistanis!" (23 Dec 2001). And Kilroy takes a dim view of the Pakistanis. "Rather than promote peace and understanding between people, the Pakistanis want to generate hate," he writes. "But then what else can we expect from Pakistan?" (7 Jul 2002)



French. Not Kilroy's favourite race – "devious" (2 Feb 2003), "treacherous... not to be trusted" (16 Feb 2003) and "self-regarding" (9 Mar 2003). In short, they are utterly unlike the British and Americans, who "can be relied upon to keep their word and to act with altruism to a degree that would seem foolish to the French" (13 Apr 2003).

Germans. Kilroy finds the Germans "truculent" (2 Feb 2003). As he asks: "Is there no limit to their brazen cheek?" (13 Apr 2003).

Russians. They are "opportunist" (2 Feb 2003) and "posturing" (9 Mar 2003). But maybe not quite as bad as the French.

Africans. No bloody good at all. "Africa's plight is mostly the fault of Africans," Kilroy notes (5 Oct 2003). "Most of what is good and decent in Africa has been provided by Europe and the United States."

Iraqis. What a rabble! "They are not grateful for being liberated. They do not appreciate that the coalition forces are attempting to build a decent, democratic, civilised country. They certainly do not appear to be either able or willing to contribute to its reconstruction. Why should we put British lives on the line for this lot? They are not worth the life of one British soldier, not one. All they seem to do is moan, incessantly, about their lack of amenities" (29 Jun 2003).

Asylum-seekers. "The barmy liberals like Diane Abbott don't like the word 'swamped' when used by the Home Secretary to describe schools and GPs' surgeries being overrun by asylum seekers who cannot speak English. What word would they prefer? Overwhelmed? Drowned? Submerged? What is the problem with using proper English words to describe an appalling situation that many British people have to put up with?" (28 Apr 2002.) But Kilroy has a solution: "It is simple enough. We station paratroopers a mile from the British end of the [Channel] Tunnel... The paras herd the immigrants together and cart them off to Dover where they are dumped on a secure slow boat to – wherever" (17 Mar 2002.)

Black people in general. "Can we ask why whites are usually better swimmers than blacks?" Kilroy wonders (5 Jan 2003). "Can we, moreover, articulate some other, less palatable truths: that there is, for example, more racial prejudice within and between ethnic minorities in Britain than there is between the white indigenous population and immigrants? Can we acknowledge that black youths are responsible for the majority of gun and street crime and that it is they who ought therefore to be targeted without feeling the necessity to point out that the majority of burglars and conmen are white?... Yes, of course we can – and we should." Kilroy can't stand "pushy blacks" or "talentless blacks and Asians" (19 Aug 2001.) Or whingeing ones: "Are you fed up of some bleating blacks and Asians blaming their own failures on how their forefathers were exploited by the British Empire?... Why don't they stop whining and get a life?" (7 Dec 2003). Not that he's slow to defend black people when they're genuinely oppressed: a few years ago he took up the case of a black motorist who was stopped by the police in Cheltenham. The man in question was, er, Kilroy's chauffeur.

Foreigners in general. Otherwise known as "parasitic foreigners" and "dodgy foreigners". (2 Dec 2001). Kilroy gets very angry if anyone blames the rise in British HIV cases on sexual promiscuity or suggests that TB might have something to do with inadequate sanitation, bad diet, poverty, etc. "The indigenous population is not responsible. The diseases are being brought here by refugees, immigrants and tourists... It is the foreigners that we have to focus on" (1 Dec 2002). And focus he does.

Arabs. "Can everyone stop blaming the British and Americans for the fact that there are a load of thieving Arabs in Iraq?" he demands (4 May 2003). "The orgy of thieving in Iraq has more to do with the character of the people than the absence of restraining troops." So what is the Arab character? "There could be few starker demonstrations of the difference between Britain and the United States and the Arabs than the manner in which they treat their civilians and their dead," he writes (4 Jan 2004). "While the Arabs desert their dead soldiers in the desert to be buried with reverence by the Americans, we go to enormous lengths to retrieve every single body... Who says that all cultures are morally equal?" Certainly not Kilroy, who regards the Arabs as a waste of space. "Few of them make much contribution to the welfare of the rest of the world. Indeed, apart from oil – which was discovered, is produced and is paid for by the West – what do they contribute? Can you think of anything? Anything really useful? Anything really valuable? Something we really need, could not do without? No, nor can I."

Something that could never, of course, be said of Robert Kilroy-Silk.

TONY BLAIR is leaving nothing to chance in his bid to bring in top up fees for university students (despite promising not to do so in his last election manifesto).

Dealing with backbench rebels in the Commons is one thing; but the less biddable peers in the House of Lords are quite another. All of which partly explains why David Triesman, ex-general-secretary of the Labour party, has recently been made a life peer and appointed a government whip in the Lords.

Though the safe passage of its controversial top up fees legislation is vital for Labour, could this be the same David Triesman who, as general-secretary of the Association of University Teachers, famously announced on 8 February 2001 that "university staff will be relieved to see the threat of top up fees removed from the political horizon... Today will be a blow to university vice-chancellors who support the idea that students can afford to contribute more towards the cost of their education"?

And could it be the same David Triesman who, on elevation to the Lords announced: "I will be working in a team doing my best to persuade people that the government's programme is extremely important. Some of my experience working in the universities may mean that I can make a contribution there. It is very hard for the Government to get a lot of things through the Lords"?

SO what does Gordon Brown really think of the Dear Leader's plans for top up fees?

Officially the brooding chancellor is backing the prime minister all of the way, to the extent that he's even been meeting reluctant MPs to encourage them to vote with the government. Yet his closest political ally, the former chief whip Nick Brown, is a prominent rebel and shows no sign of toeing the line – and the Newcastle East MP rarely does anything without speaking to G. Brown first.

Then is the chancellor's spat with his old enemy, education secretary Charles Clarke. Clarke's political career is on the line over top up fees – and Gordon knows it. He also knows that Clarke needs a great deal of dosh from the treasury if he is to make his higher education bill vaguely palatable to Labour rebels – which is why Gordon is so reluctant to open the coffers.

MUCH excitement at the prospect of more Labour shenanigans in the safe Ealing Acton seat soon to be vacated by veteran backbencher Clive Soley.

While Soley was rumoured to want a local woman to follow in his footsteps, Downing Street policy adviser Ravi Rahman is busy parading his wares, while the leader of Hammersmith council, Andrew Slaughter, is also limbering up for the fray.

A key Slaughter ally is Hammersmith and Fulham Labour MP Iain Coleman, who has reportedly struck a hilarious "Granita"-style deal with Slaughter whereby Coleman backs Slaughter this time around and Slaughter backs Coleman at the subsequent general election when the pair would have to compete for the one safe seat in the area that is expected to emerge from boundary changes.

PS: The on-message Andrew Slaughter was parachuted into the Uxbridge by-election in 1997 by Tony Blair over the head of popular general election candidate David Williams, who failed even to make it to the selection shortlist. Despite a morale-boosting by-election visit by the Dear Leader, during which he praised Slaughter for "being a supporter of mine", the "new" Labour candidate recorded fewer votes than Williams had managed a few months earlier.

MICHAEL Howard's plea to the public sector for ideas on how to cut red tape and costs – published in *Guardian* Society this month – has thrown up an interesting answer.

One bureaucrat points out that every data protection request received by government departments and quangos takes around two hours to be properly dealt with by a civil servant. If members of Mr Howard's party would only stop submitting data protection requests to check for anti-Tory bias in the civil service, it would save thousands of work hours and tens of thousands of pounds.

DESPITE infuriating most of her comrades in the left-wing Campaign Group of MPs over her decision to send her son to a fee-paying school, Diane Abbott steadfastly refuses to step down as group secretary – despite plenty of polite and not-so polite invitations for her to do so.

At a recent meeting, Abbott even rounded on one of her critics, the mild mannered John McDonnell, accusing the Hayes MP of being "racist" for wanting her to step down. A suddenly ferocious McDonnell reminded Abbott that he had been campaigning against racism all his life.

JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

6 January: At Commons select committee, lord chancellor maintains need for an independent judicial appointments system free of political influence.

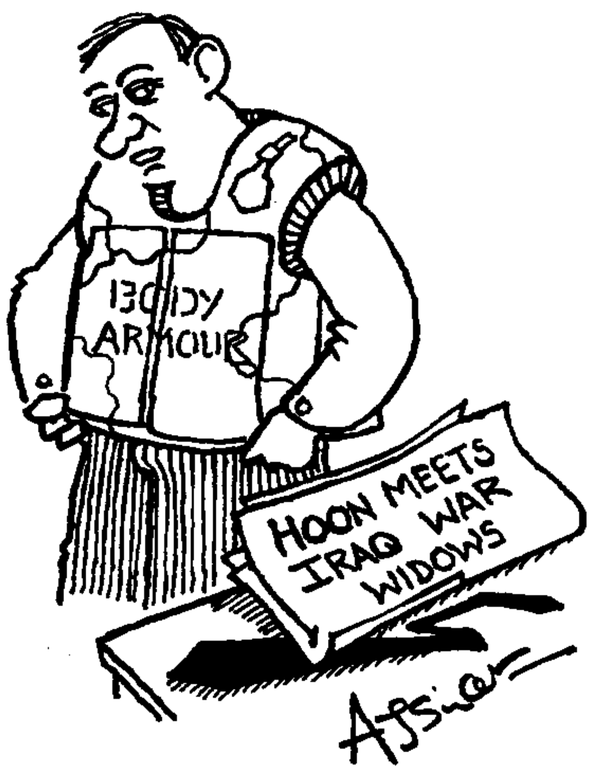
14 January: Home office takes over decision-making on early release of prisoners in "high profile cases".

SO home secretary David Blunkett intends to merge the prison and probation services under the National Offender Management Service (NOMS). Insiders are already dubbing it GNOMES and fear it will simply create another layer of management bureaucracy over two overrun services which will keep their separate identities.

Eye readers will recall how the last probation shake-up only two years ago led to the setting up of the National Probation Directorate. It has since grown by nearly 400 percent, employing 430 staff (including 32 consultants) to the detriment of frontline services.

The directorate has a £20m shortfall and has just asked all 42 probation areas to claw back 2 percent of their budget. For many who have already spent a large chunk of their funds this amounts to an 8 percent cut in real terms.

Napo, the probation union, fears this will lead to a recruitment freeze in a service where one in 20 frontline jobs are already vacant. Yet the directorate's message to chief officers is that "this must be achieved without detriment to the service" and "the key message to get across is that we are not facing a crisis, despite the claims made in recent media reporting". Yeah right.



TINKER, TAYLOR

ONE interesting aspect of the Hutton inquiry is the difference between the intelligence information Lord Hutton was given compared with that made available to parliament.

The report of the Commons foreign affairs committee published last summer complained at length about the refusal of the government to allow any of the major intelligence players in the preparations for the war in Iraq to give evidence. These included (par 6) "the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Office Intelligence Co-ordinator; the chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (John Scarlett); the chief of defence intelligence; the head of the secret intelligence committee and the director of GCHQ".

All of them had letters from the committee asking them to appear for questioning. Through the foreign secretary Jack Straw, all refused to attend. At the same time the committee was denied access to a host of intelligence papers. "We are confident," the committee concluded, "that our inquiry would have been enhanced if our requests had been met."

The committee rejected the government's excuse – that intelligence matters were exclusively the business of the intelligence and security committee. This committee is appointed by the prime minister, sits in secret and is not accountable to parliament. One solution the MPs proposed was that the intelligence and security committee should be reconstituted as a parliamentary committee with proper democratic responsibilities. This has not been done and nor is there the slightest sign that it will be.

Lord Hutton had a quite different experience. He interviewed most of the intelligence chieftains who boycotted the parliamentary committee, and had access to all the secret papers and information denied to the MPs. One MP who must be more nervous than most about the Hutton report is Ann Taylor, Labour MP for Dewsbury and former leader of the Commons.

When Tony Blair's notorious dossier was being drawn up, she chaired the (wholly undemocratic and unaccountable) intelligence and security committee. Documents from Hutton's website reveal how closely she was involved in the infamous dossier that formed the basis of the prime minister's reasons for going to war.

On 18 September 2002, soon after the dossier was prepared, Martin Rycroft from Blair's office sent a memo to his colleagues, including Jonathan Powell and Alastair Campbell. "The PM has asked Ann Taylor to read through the dossier in draft and give us any comments. He stressed that it is for her and for her only and that no one else outside this building was seeing it in draft. I'm contacting John Scarlett to work out how this should happen – needs to be tomorrow."

Taylor was summoned to John Scarlett's office at 8am on 19 September. She read the dossier and passed her comments to Scarlett who then passed them back to the prime minister. Thus it was that Ann Taylor, an elected MP, came to be shown in advance the draft of a document that was refused to her fellow MPs at the time, and even later.

Her comments, as revealed by Hutton, were that the dossier should more explicitly refer back to the end of the Gulf War; that it "needs to come across as an impartial, professional assessment of the threat"; and that "the hardest questions in the debate not fully answered by the dossier remain why now and why Saddam. The PM should take these on in his statement to undercut critics".

Whether Blair did anything at all to address these points is a matter for Hutton. What seems certain is that Ann Taylor made no complaint.

'Backbiter'

● A piece in HP Sauce on the political influence of computer firm Fujitsu in *Eye* 1094 stated that "Westminster Tory MP Mark Fisher's research assistant runs a PR firm with one client: Fujitsu". The Tory MP for Westminster is in fact Mark Field. His research assistant does have a contract with Fujitsu. Mark Fisher is the Labour MP for Stoke-on-Trent. Neither he nor his staff is connected to Fujitsu. Apologies to Mr Field and Mr Fisher.

FOCUS ON THE BARCLAY BROTHERS

LAST weekend was a busy one for the Barclay brothers. As well as staging their *Telegraph* coup, the twins began expanding their retail operations even though trade secretary Patricia Hewitt has yet to approve this £1.34bn spending spree.

Many national Sunday newspapers carried expensive ads for the new Additions Direct catalogue, available to pick up this week in branches of Boots. Although you wouldn't know it from the ad copy, the catalogue is nothing to do with Boots at all. The troubled pharmacy chain is simply being paid by the Barclays to pile free copies on its floors in the hope that customers will pick one up and order a toaster or duvet. In fact, Additions used to be owned by the GUS conglomerate, best known for its Great Universal, Kays and Marshall Ward brands.

In 2002 the Barclays bought the Littlewoods stores and mail-order business from the Moores family, and immediately started sacking people (and scrapping traditional donations to Merseyside charities). Last year they conjured up another £590m in staged payments for GUS's catalogues. Merging Littlewoods and GUS will create a virtual mail-order monopoly, which is bad news for millions of low-income customers who already pay much higher than high street prices for the "privilege" of making weekly HP instalments, often with very high interest rates.

With Littlewoods, the Barclays also acquired a subsidiary called Business Express which handles dispatches on behalf of Boots, Harrods and Woolworths. Meanwhile GUS owns Reality, which delivers stuff for the company's own catalogues and for Argos, QVC *et al*. If the merger is allowed to proceed, the combined Business Express and Reality will process the majority of business-to-consumer parcels sent within the UK, allowing the Barclays to dominate the home delivery industry, and raise prices.

But of course Patricia Hewitt has yet to endorse the Littlewoods-GUS merger, which has been the subject of an unpublished competition commission report. This minor detail obviously doesn't worry the Barclays, who've pushed ahead regardless.

Should Hewitt find her nerve and refuse retrospective approval, they will have to unravel their current home shopping activities at great expense and sell the catalogues to someone else. Since they seem to have endless financial resources, this may not worry them too much; but GUS's staff and customers have much greater causes for concern, which will undoubtedly be reported objectively in *The Business* (assuming it survives) and the *Telegraph* titles.

JUST FANCY THAT!

ANOTHER company heavily involved in the destruction of Iraq is poised to profit from its reconstruction.

The Harris Corporation is the latest US outfit to pick up a juicy invasion dividend: a $96m contract to run radio stations, two TV channels and a national newspaper in Iraq. Harris is also a high tech weapons manufacturer, responsible for the electronics that go into the "joint Direct Attack Munitions", or JDAM, a 2000lb guided bomb, and the air-launched cruise missile – both of which caused so much damage on the ground.

Establishing a free media in Iraq is seen as an important step in fostering democracy there. Unfortunately the Harris contract was awarded in Washington, not Baghdad; and even Harris admits it got the job from "the Defence Contracting Command-Washington (on behalf of the Coalition Provisional Authority".

Haider Abadi, supposedly the communications minister of Iraq, said he wasn't even consulted about the contract and may overturn it in July when the Iraqi governing council is scheduled to take over.

HOW PFI WORKS (Cont.)

MORE on the catastrophic private finance initiative (PFI) in Paddington Basin, where the costs of a new hospital – to merge the Royal Brompton and Harefield Hospital – have more than doubled from £360m to £800m (see *Eyes* 1087 and 1088).

It seems the monstrous over-run was even noticed in the treasury where, despite chancellor Gordon Brown's boundless enthusiasm for PFI, there was a marked reluctance to approve a project whose costs had risen so effortlessly. Delay followed delay, and the result has now proved disastrous. In a presentation to the strategic health authority on 4 November (in a hall so packed with protesters he couldn't even show his slides), the highly-paid mastermind of the project, Nigel Hudson, announced that "without relocations and decants the Paddington Health Campus cannot go ahead".

He explained that his "preferred option" was to take out a fantastically expensive lease on a prestigious office building called The Point, owned by the telephone company Orange. *Whoops!* The *Estates Gazette* (10 Jan) now reports that the deal to lease The Point to the health authority has fallen through. A spokesman for Orange said it was breaking off negotiations and was going to lease the building floor by floor to other companies.

There are many in the area (and especially round the much-coveted Harefield hospital) who hope and pray the whole Paddington project is dead in the water. If so, it should certainly take its place among the most outrageous wastes of public money that even PFI has ever produced. In an answer to John Randall, Tory MP for Uxbridge, on 3 November, health minister John Hutton revealed that until 31 March last year £3.177m had been spent on "advisers' fees" for the Paddington Health Campus fiasco.

Some of the lucky beneficiaries of this public largesse – the usual accountants, lawyers and architects – were published in *Eye* 1087. But all that public money (plus whatever else has been spent since March) is gurgling down the drain.

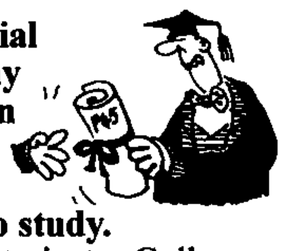
NORMAN Lamb, Lib Dem MP for Norfolk North, has written to health secretary John Reid to protest at the fantastic government hand-out to Octagon, a big private consortium engaged for one of the first PFI contracts – to build the Norfolk and Norwich hospital.

The "refinancing" of the original contract doles out an astonishing £70m windfall to the company, and only £30m to the hospital trust, payable at £1m a year over 30 years. "This looks," writes Mr Lamb, "to be an extraordinarily expensive deal from the point of view of the health service and it seems to me that there should be a proper investigation into the contract."

Hopes of such an investigation (and a meeting with Reid) are low. When it comes to hand-outs of taxpayers' money to big companies, no minister is more generous than the former Communist health secretary.

PS: Most of the taxpayers' bounty from the Norfolk and Norwich "refinancing" will go to the impoverished Barclays Bank and the big building combine, John Laings.

HIGH PRINCIPALS



AFTER two years of financial disaster, Westminster Kingsway College is to close its campus in Battersea, south London, leaving 1,500 sixth form and adult students with nowhere to study.

The old Battersea-based Westminster College merged with central London's Kingsway in 2000. In the last two years the college governors have managed to preside over a spectacular £6.9m loss, forcing the Learning and Skills Council to step in to carry out monthly audits of the finances.

Selling the Battersea buildings will raise funds to help plug the deficit but it will leave no FE college in the area. South Thames College says it hopes to be able to pick up the work, but has no plans to take over the site or offer the same courses.

Sarah Cave, the college's NATFHE union co-ordinator said: "Last year they were closing down courses here, saying it was because they were going to develop the campus for basic skills. Now they're saying there aren't enough students on the site to make Battersea viable."

The union requested a detailed breakdown of the accounts last July and still hasn't been given access to them. Meanwhile college principal Richard Williams is walking away from the row. He quit this month.

IT'S no wonder student loans won't stretch far these days when student halls are being turned into swanky conference facilities which are (inconveniently) filled with young people for a large part of the year.

With few options other than moving into university accommodation, students struggle to find cheap, basic rooms for low rent. At the University of Plymouth, the student's union is furious at plans for Jarvis University Partnerships Programme (UPP) to take over the running of two more halls of residence in a 35-year, £60m deal with the university.

UPP is the same Jarvis offshoot that made such a pig's ear of the new Graduate College hall at Lancaster University, which readers may remember was badly wired, insecure, dirty and tended to flood when it opened last year (*Eye* 1094).

Students living in Plymouth's two newly-built blocks, constructed by and maintained by UPP on a 30-year, PFI-style contract, are paying rent of around £80 a week for rooms with the en suite facilities beloved of conference goers. But as the union points out, students need cheap rooms and most are more than happy to share a bathroom if it means paying less rent.

POLICE 5

POLICE in Gravesend, Kent, obviously have a long memory... but it is proving expensive.

In February 1997 the *Eye* reported the case of Gill Emerson, an anti-racist campaigner who was arrested for circulating a leaflet complaining about police protection of Nazi thugs in the town.

Emerson was arrested, cast into a cell for eight hours, prosecuted under the public order act and then acquitted. She sued the police for battery and false imprisonment and was later awarded £2,500 damages.

Eighteen months after the award, Gill Emerson attended another demonstration in the town. She was sitting on a wall when she was arrested, thrown to the ground handcuffed and again cast into a police cell. Again she sued. This month she was awarded damages of £3,500, and Kent police have to pay all the costs of the case – at least 10 times that amount.

EYE TV

***Little Friends*, C4**
The Sack Race, BBC2

READERS of a certain age may recall a TV show called the Minipops, in which pre-pubescents were dressed as pop stars, caked in make up and made to perform for our viewing pleasure. The little dears trilled like demented chipmunks until it suddenly occurred to the nation that what we had all thought was great entertainment was actually a sicko porn fantasy.

Minipops, lest we forget, was broadcast in 1983 on a brand new, *bien pensant* broadcaster called Channel 4. Twenty-one years later its latest kid-flick, **Little Friends**, serves as an interesting marker to see how far we have – or haven't – come. Four child actors are given an adult script and set loose on the public with hidden cameras in tow. The comedy comes from kids saying things adults couldn't or wouldn't – like when little Billy asks Daddy what Mummy was doing to the milkman.

One sketch has 12-year-old Robert conducting a faux-naïve "report" on "gays", asking a middle-aged lady: "What is fisting?" Another has young William asking a random punter in a park to read him a letter left for him that morning by his mother, as he claims he has lost his glasses. The letter turns out to be a vicious tirade against the boy's absent father, swearing, affairs and all.

It's worth asking just what's going on in that last set-up. The man in the park is helping out a young child who has asked for assistance; most of us would probably do the same. As the reading runs on the man becomes unsettled and suggests the boy shouldn't be hearing this fast-track induction to adulthood, full of resentment and recrimination. So does that make the man in the park a dupe for not realising he's being hoodwinked? "Our four actors hit the streets of Britain and persuade members of the public to drop their guard", boasts the Channel 4 bumf. But if dropping your guard means helping out young children, then media-savvy, clued-up Britain is going to be a pretty soulless place.

For a programme that seems so remarkably pleased with itself, *Little Friends* is also sluggishly derivative. There are borrowings from Dennis Pennis, Chris Morris, Ali G, Louis Theroux and all the other practitioners of saying the unsayable with a poker face. But in every case, their comedy had a target – Pennis cut Hollywood stars down to size; Morris preyed on media dogma; Ali G stung

"New figures released today show that BBC digital programmes are watched by virtually nobod..... Hello?"

pompous gits wanting yoof credentials; Theroux hammered the deluded and the self-obsessed.

By contrast *Little Friends* feeds off the public's inexcusable desire to be nice to children. "It's a kind of instant soap opera/sitcom thing with reality and docudrama undertones," series producer Mike Agnew has said. In other words, he has no idea what it's trying to do, but hell, a ten-year old saying "fuck" is bound to get a laugh.

The Sack Race, the BBC's latest hidden-camera offering, stars adults rather than kids but again comes with that whiff of smugness that suggests the producers are having more fun than the viewers. Two members of the public are placed in new jobs and have to try to get sacked as close as possible to 3 o'clock. The rules are they cannot swear, break the law or strip. Whoever gets the heave-ho nearest to 3pm wins £37.25, which the voiceover tells us, with relish, is the average day's wage for the two jobs.

Last week's opener saw Hannah working at a florist, while Dave was at an internet company. Again, the producers seemed out of touch with how normal people behave, as no matter how much Hannah flounced about, or Dave did his David Brent schtick, both their employers were frustratingly reasonable and gave them the benefit of the doubt. Eventually Hannah twigged that the best way to get sacked is not outrageous, telegenic behaviour, but simply to refuse to do a task she was given.

There is much here to suggest that this was an idea that looked great on paper in media la-la-land, but which during production has been revealed as unworkable. Firstly, if the employers had no idea the contestants were plants, how were the myriad cameras installed in the workplaces they ran? Moreover, the initial press release said that the two contestants would be "up coming comedians", but in the BBC's subsequent missives no mention of the contestants being professional performers was made, and the programme neglects to clarify. The idea that these are people off the street is obviously much more appealing than admitting that the whole thing's a stitch-up.

The feeling that this is one the BBC would like swept under the carpet is augmented by the scheduling – not only was the first episode transmitted originally slated to be the last episode, but after week one the show has mysteriously disappeared from the listings. The BBC are blaming "production problems"; perhaps the "problem" they are referring to is that *The Sack Race* is crap. Like *Little Friends*, it's television that's simple to greenlight, cheap to make and great fun – but only if you're one of the gilded elite behind the camera.

'The Zapper'

GOING LIVE

NEWS 24 kept up with the Robert Kilroy-Silk story by going live to reporter Duncan Kennedy standing in the rain outside Teddington Studios, where Kilroy is recorded when its presenter is not on forced gardening leave.

"So, no sign of Mr Kilroy-Silk then, Duncan?"

"No, no sign at all."

FOR insight it was hard to beat the BBC *Ten O'Clock News*'s decision to go live to political correspondent Mark Mardell in a deserted House of Commons lobby on 7 January for the latest on the Hutton report.

"When the report comes out it will have many and interesting things to say," Mardell revealed.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Greg is now in the twilight years of his career, this is probably his last year in top class tennis and he would have wanted to go out on a high."

— Alan Parsons, BBC News 8 January.

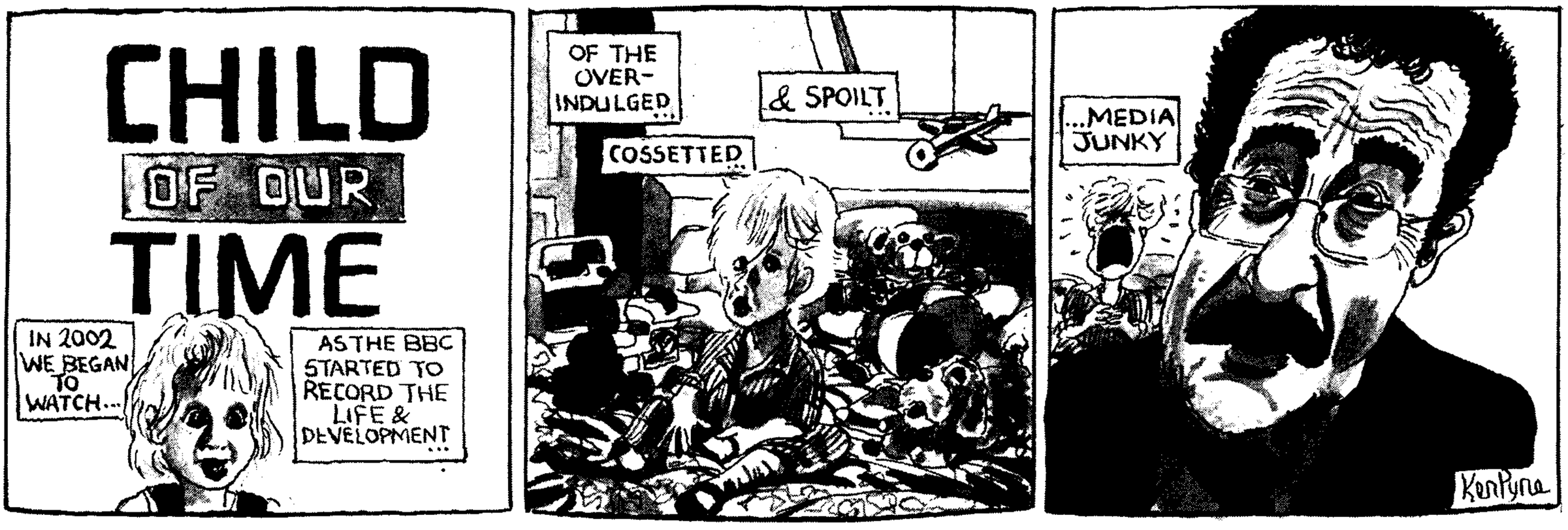
DUMB BRITAIN

The Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: Which animal builds dams and lodges?
Contestant: Sheep.
Robinson: "Bolster" is an anagram of which marine crustacean?
Contestant: Crab.
Robinson: What was the relationship between the novelist Evelyn Waugh and the journalist Auberon Waugh?
Contestant: Sister.

Steve Wright Show, Radio 2

"Wrighty": Who stars opposite Jude Law in the film Cold Mountain?
Contestant: Ethel Merman.



MEDIA NEWS

A MERE 13 days before Lord Hutton was due to produce his report, BBC chairman Gavyn Davies pre-empted it by telling the *Financial Times he* has ruled out any "major reforms" of BBC procedures.

Ofcom, it seems, is much more worrying for the BBC than Hutton – at least for now. In what looks like a "major reform", every producer of every pre-recorded item, either on radio or television, now has to fill in a "compliance form".

These are inspected by "compliance managers", who decide whether or not to give the green light for transmission. Along with any violent or sexual content, producers must highlight any "legal issues" that would once have been reported to a duty lawyer instead. They must also report "any public figures as contributors", "public figures – reference to", "personal views" or "cultural sensitivities".

Once again the role of the editor in BBC news and current affairs has been undermined by another tier of bureaucrats who have never made a programme in their lives. So much for Greg Dyke's vow to "cut the crap".

A BBC documentary on Mohamed Fayed's dealings with the Inland Revenue, *The Curious Case of the Disappearing Pharaoh*, has certainly lived up to its name. Viewers hoping to watch it on 8 January were instead given a repeat of a year-old *Money Programme* about McDonald's, as the Phoney Pharaoh had obtained a temporary court order banning the broadcast.

The film's reporter, foghorn-voiced ex-*Observer* hack John Sweeney, had needed Fayed's cooperation to obtain key documents about his battle with the taxman. In return, Chairman Mo was promised he could have a preview of the programme and point out any factual errors – though the BBC would of course retain ultimate editorial control.

Fayed watched the film with Sweeney before Christmas, and after a predictable outburst ("You shitting on me!") listed the alleged inaccuracies. A couple of small changes were duly made to the commentary. But a few hours before transmission he dispatched his lawyers to the high court, claiming that he was now entitled to see the re-edited version (to which, no doubt, he would suggest further alterations, and so on ad infinitum). Mr Justice Royce granted a 21-day injunction.

A disconsolate Sweeney adjourned to a bar to drown his sorrows. After plentiful refreshment, he then headed off to a party hosted by his boss, BBC executive David Stanford, and started quaffing flaming sambucas. Alas! Sweeney spilt a glass of the blazing drink over Stanford and set fire to his suit.

While colleagues rushed to offer Stanford commiseration and assistance, Sweeney reached for another glass – which he then spilt over his own suit. "Look, I've set myself on fire as well," he wailed. "But no one cares about *me*."

EVEN as the London 2012 team was kicking off its Olympic bid last week at Covent Garden with the backing of Tony Blair (remember how well that worked for the 2006 World Cup bid?), there were already signs the battle ahead is going to be hard and ugly.

When he noticed that a Sky News poll wasn't showing as much support for London as might have been hoped, the bid's commercial director Charles Wijeratna instantly swung into action with an email to as many friends as he could round up: "Please can you support the Bid for London 2012 by going to the attached link (http://www.sky.com/skynews/home) and voting that you think London will win."

Displaying the international goodwill that characterises the Olympic spirit, Wijeratna added: "We're being duffed up by the French or someone who has hijacked the poll – need some weight of numbers. Please forward to all your mates."

***SUN* TV critic Ally Ross was generous in his appraisal of the World Darts Championship, calling Andy "Viking" Fordham's victory one of the "great TV moments of 2004".**

Unfortunately Ross found no room in his column to record another highlight of the competition: the moment when the MC announced the *Sun* hack's own presence in the audience. Ross was greeted with a chorus of boos and a chant of "Bring Back Bushell".

In fact his predecessor Garry Bushell's career has been going from strength to strength since he was sacked by the *Sun*. He appeared recently as the "celebrity guest bingo caller" on the Avago satellite channel.

I-SKY

RUPERT Murdoch's *Sun* may be ailing under Rebekah Wade (readership figures for December were the lowest in 30 years), but it can still prop up other parts of the Dirty Digger's empire.

"IS THIS TV'S MOST GRUESOME SHOW?" demanded the paper on 14 January over a large "news" story about *Nip/Tuck*, aired the night before on Sky One. Alongside ad time on ITV and Channel 4 which ran trailers for the show (confusing for those without satellite access), a full page of the Murdoch tabloid was devoted to promising "more sex and surgery in future episodes".

At least *Nip/Tuck* is a new product, unlike Skybet, the interactive betting service which was plugged at length by hack Andy Totham in the *Sun* four days earlier. "A strange thing happened the other night – I discovered heaven – at the tips of my fingers," he drooled, continuing in similar vein for 730 words. One can only presume Totham is slow on the uptake: the Skybet service has been available to all Sky customers since 2002.

LUVVIES

In Hollywood integrity is the new must-have. Actors, agents and studio heads are branding themselves as conscious consumers by adding their names to waiting lists for a Toyota Prius, booking natural gas-powered limos, catering parties with organic foods and photocopying scripts on recycled paper.

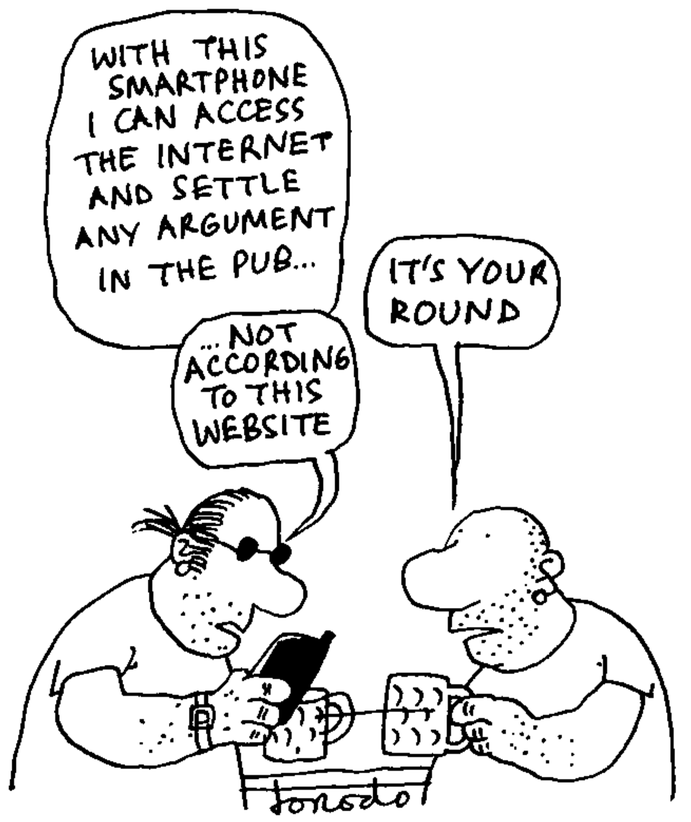
GINA PICCOLO
Los Angeles Times

Submitted by B.J. O'Byrne.

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

AD NAUSEAM

READERS will recall that *Eye* 1094 was riven with excitement at the prospect of a new joint venture between Euro RSCG's Mark Wnek, adland's self-confessed "lifestyle commando", and McCann Erickson's Ben Langdon. Given their combined history of


WITH THIS SMARTPHONE I CAN ACCESS THE INTERNET AND SETTLE ANY ARGUMENT IN THE PUB...
...NOT ACCORDING TO THIS WEBSITE
IT'S YOUR ROUND
Gonsalo

delicate self-effacement, "any bets on Wnek-Langdon being the name above the door?" was our parting question.

And lo, it has come to pass... but better than we could ever have imagined. Langdon and Wnek have teamed up with the magnificently embossed former TBWA planner Orlando Hooper-Greenhill, but because Euro RSCG has forbidden Wnek from using his surname on a new agency (even though it has dropped Wnek's name from its own title) the trio have plumped for the oh-so-Boho "Mark, Ben, Orlando". As yet they have no clients.

HOW MAGAZINES WORK

AS magazine giants Emap and IPC lock horns with their two new men's weeklies, Nuts and Zoo Weekly, hacks have been quick to point out the similarities between the two, which range from a near-identical masthead to the bra, beer and balls content.

Could this be because Nuts' editor Phil Hilton was working on Emap's "secret" launch for more than six months before IPC lured him to be its editor instead? Of course not. Professional honour would have prevented Hilton from revealing what his previous employer was planning, so the mags' amazing similarity is simply a case of great minds thinking alike.

THE NEOPHILIACS

"England's victory was... a great infrastructure project as well as an epiphany. Maybe [Clive] Woodward is the new Isambard Kingdom Brunel." — Paul Hayward, *Daily Telegraph*.

"Poor is the new rich." — *Financial Times* online.

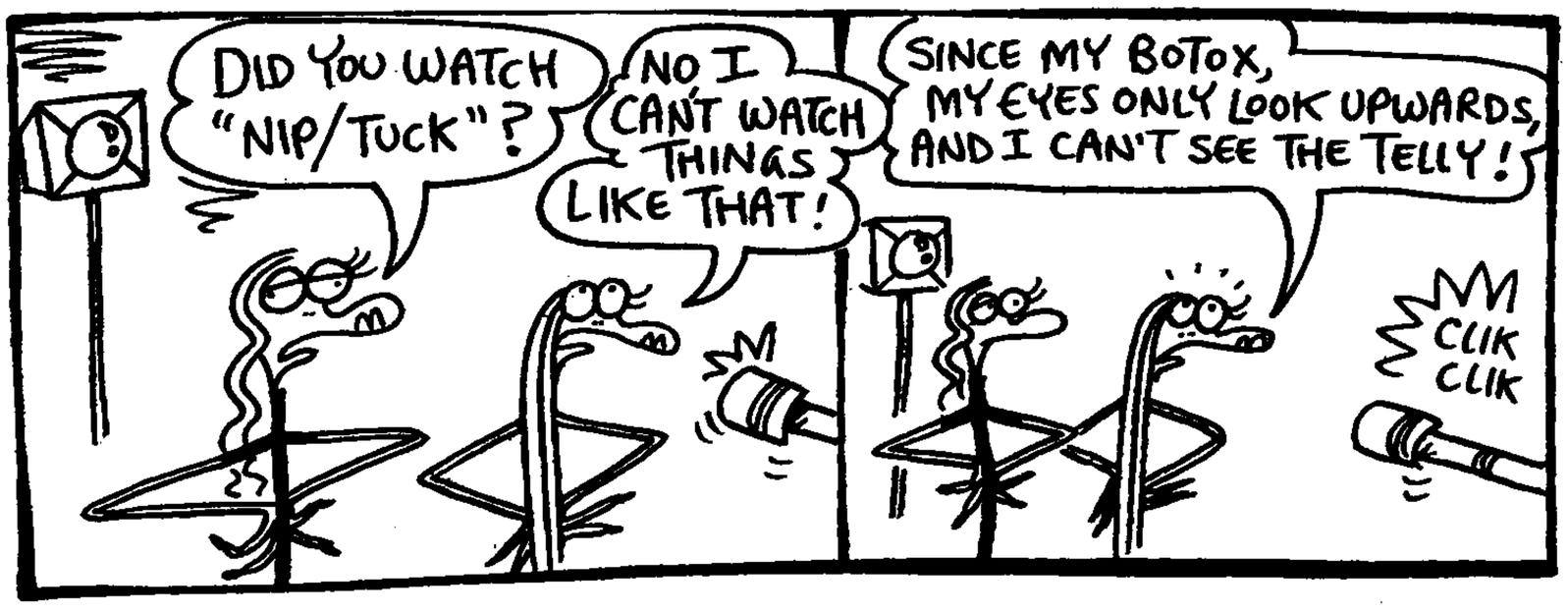
"Fifty is the new thirty." — Jenni Murray, *The Message*, Radio 4.

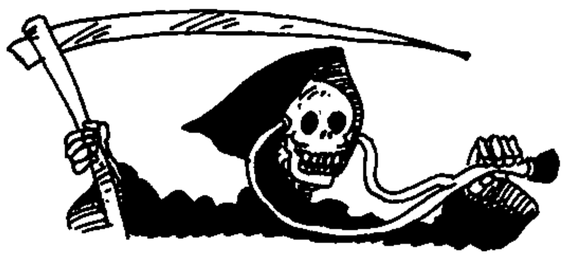
"This year, the new black is anything but black." — Louisa Pearson, *Scotsman*.

"Is bad the new good?" — Simon Mayo, Radio 5 Live.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


DID YOU WATCH "NIP/TUCK"?
NO I CAN'T WATCH THINGS LIKE THAT!
SINCE MY BOTOX, MY EYES ONLY LOOK UPWARDS, AND I CAN'T SEE THE TELLY!
CLIK CLIK



DOING THE ROUNDS

Another Bristol?

THE Paediatric Congenital Cardiac Services Review Group (PCCSRG) was set up in January 2001 "to make recommendations for the safe organisation of child heart services" following the Bristol inquiry. Its report was given a low profile, late December publication, perhaps to disguise the fact that the government has no intention of reducing the number of units carrying out child heart surgery, despite the unanimous recommendation of a group of clinical experts, patients, NHS managers and department of health officials.

There are 14 child heart units in the UK, with 12 performing surgery, and all have made good progress since the *Eye* exposed the disastrous situation in Bristol 14 years ago. The latest surgical mortality rates show that all units are performing to a safe standard and there are no "significant outliers". So, the government argues, why should any be downgraded?

As elsewhere in the NHS, there is a staffing crisis in paediatric cardiac services. Some centres don't have round the clock senior cover for intensive care and there is a dire shortage of paediatric cardiologists and intensive care nurses. To comply with European law and the working time directive (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*), there would need to be a minimum of three surgeons in every unit, to allow any of them ever to have a holiday and comply with the law. At present, only two centres satisfy this requirement, and there is no promise of expansion in the other units even if the surgeons existed.

However, the biggest shortfall is in the number of paediatric cardiologists. There are currently 67 in post in the UK, and the PCCSRG says a further 30 are needed immediately to cope safely with their workload, with an additional 20 to meet the increased work resulting from the fact that as treatment is more successful, many more children survive long into adulthood. There is no sign of these cardiologists being recruited, indeed quite the reverse with many choosing to work in properly- staffed units overseas.

The PCCSRG wisely concludes that the only way to provide safely and legally staffed services in future will be to concentrate surgical expertise and support teams on fewer sites. It recommends two in London and one each in the north-east, north-west, Midlands and south-west. The larger volume of surgery in each centre would have the added benefit of providing even better audit information for patient choice and safety. All other units would continue to offer non-surgical services; but the political ramifications of any "downgrading" would be huge, and clearly too much for health secretary John Reid to stomach close to election year. The chief executive in Newcastle upon Tyne hospitals NHS trust, which serves Blair's constituency, has already said that he would have patients "marching on the street" if any closure of surgery was mooted.

So, rationalisation is not going to happen. All 12 units will continue to provide a miraculously safe service with inadequate staffing in contravention of European law, until one unit cracks under the pressure. Such is the fear of reprisal in the NHS, that errors and mistakes will be hidden for as long as possible until the problem becomes so huge it can no longer be ignored. The seeds have already been sown for another Bristol, and the blame lies firmly with this cowardly government.

Correction

The former BMA chairman who shared an election platform with Blair in 1997 was Dr John Marks, not his brother Professor Vincent Marks. Both are now among the senior doctors and former Labour supporters who believe the introduction of foundation hospitals and private treatment centres will greatly damage the NHS (see last *Eye*).

M.D.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY

I'M HERE FOR MY APPOINTMENT. HAVE I GOT TIME TO NIP TO THE CAFETERIA AND GRAB SOME COFFEE?
RECEPTION
MADAM...
RECEPT
YOU'VE GOT TIME TO FLY TO COLOMBIA AND PICK THE BEANS
WAITING ROOM

SIGNAL FAILURES

ONE reason the "strategic" rail authority (SRA) has failed to contain costs or improve performance is Richard Bowker, its chairman and chief executive.

Despite having no experience of managing a railway, he insisted the rail industry needed his personal leadership, as distinct from leadership from the SRA as a whole. Instead of appointing an experienced rail manager as chief executive, he bagged that role for himself. The results (*Eyes passim ad nauseam*) should be printed in textbooks to show business students why one person shouldn't be both chairman and chief executive of any big organisation.

Why did the government appoint Bowker and give him so much leeway when his only credential in mainline railways was his involvement in Virgin Rail's disastrous business plans? Because only a self-deluding person would have accepted the task. By definition, the managers who were savvy enough to lead a rail industry knew how unworkable our fragmented system is – and that the SRA was unlikely to succeed while "new" Labour was set against restructuring.

The government has finally had enough of entrusting a vital public service and billions of pounds to Bowker's "leadership" – but that doesn't mean it's any closer to ending the shambles. Launching yet another review shows that after all this time "new" Labour still hasn't prepared a plan. The danger is that it will again choose to edge a few more degrees towards the obvious solution, an approach that has already proved more expensive and painful than going straight there.

Neither the transport department nor the private companies can run the rail network by themselves, so a body like the SRA will still be needed and should have a remit to operate the main passenger services. Commuter lines in Kent are already run by the state and could easily be joined by both Virgin franchises, which have only survived this long because of Bowker's bailouts with hundreds of millions of taxpayer pounds. Other franchises can be brought in-house as they expire or when they breach their contract terms.

Merging those operations with Network Rail's infrastructure stewardship would see operation, maintenance and upgrading managed together and with just one goal: public service that's safe and cost-effective. Once the conflicting financial interests of so many private parties are eliminated, rail performance would improve, subsidy would stretch farther and upgrades could be delivered on time and to budget again. And with that in prospect, managers who are capable and experienced would again be willing to lead the industry.

'Dr B. Ching'

THE COMMUTERS
HEY! WE'VE BEEN STUCK ON THIS TRAIN FOR AGES! IT HASN'T MOVED AT ALL!
CAN'T YOU MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT?
MOMENTS LATER...
THIS IS YOUR GUARD SPEAKING...YOU HAVE BEEN STUCK ON THIS TRAIN FOR AGES AND IT HASN'T MOVED AT ALL...
CONRAIL
Grizelda

Number crunching

Virgin Trains 2002-03

54% ■ Increase in subsidy, to £471m, from cash-strapped SRA (headed by Richard Bowker, former co-chairman of Virgin Rail)

8.8% ■ Increase in fares income

1.7% ■ Decrease in passenger miles travelled

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

DAME AND BLAST

CAMDEN council leader Jane Roberts became a dame of the British Empire in the new year honours list – just in time, perhaps.

For Roberts, "new" Labour loyalist and media favourite, has just presided over a disastrous (for Labour) ballot of council tenants which has left the government's social housing policy in disarray. Camden was keen to switch control of its council homes to a private company called an arm's length management organisation (Almo) – a half-measure designed to calm the fears of tenants who had rejected the idea of an out-and-out stock transfer.

Alas, the result of a postal ballot on the Almo issue, announced on 9 January, was that 77 percent of residents who voted said No. Perhaps they had noted that the promises of John "Three Homes" Prescott, that opting for an Almo would release shedloads of money for doing up rundown estates, were hollow. As *Eye* 1093 reported, only two of six Almos set up in Leeds last year have performed well enough to qualify for more funds: homes in the others continue to crumble.

The Camden tenants' verdict was underlined by a high court ruling the previous day. Mr Justice Munby rejected an application by two anti-Almo tenants for a judicial review of Camden's one-sided £500,000-plus "consultation" on the issue. Camden was *not* legally obliged to present both sides of the case, said the judge. Yet, despite spending some £200 on each of the 2,700 "Yes" votes gained – and resorting to tricks such as removing anti-Almo posters from estate noticeboards and putting pro-Almo messages on every envelope posted out – Camden still failed to convince its tenants they would be better off with an Almo.

Last week Roberts had an urgent meeting with housing minister Keith Hill about how Camden might now obtain the £283m it says it needs to bring its housing stock up to the "decent homes standard" by 2010. It remains to be seen whether the obvious solution – for the government to fund this generally efficient council directly – will be politically acceptable to Privatiser Prescott.

● **GOOD to see family values are still important in Monmouthshire. Elizabeth Raikes, the county council's chief executive, appointed daughter Zoe as assistant to assistant chief executive John Palmer over the summer, while it emerges that the daughters of economic development chief Jeff Martin and environment director Rick Langford both also "temped" for their dads. Councillors who have expressed concern about these cosy arrangements have been told that, in the interests of efficiency, temporary appointments do not have to be advertised. How convenient!**

TAKING OFFENCE

IN THE last *Eye* we reported how social services staff at Tower Hamlets council had been banned by managers from calling their Christmas lunch a "Christmas lunch" in case it offended Muslims or other religious minorities, despite the lack of any evidence that such offence might be taken.

Now councillors in Britain's most deprived borough are in a politically correct tangle over another hitherto inoffensive expression. During a council meeting Lib Dem councillor Barrie Duffey became irritated at interjections from the Labour benches as he was trying to ask the mayor, Cllr Abdul Aziz Sardar, to explain a matter of procedure. Turning to the Labour councillors Duffey said he would only take "advice from the chief, not from the indians" – meaning he wanted an answer from the mayor, not the hecklers. Cue outrage from Labour councillors.

Council leader Helal Abbas said: "Some of the members of the council interpreted 'indian' as referring to an inferior group of people, as opposed to 'chief' which are [*sic*] a superior group of people." By this Abbas meant that Duffey was calling Sardar, who is Bangladeshi, "Indian", while referring to a white officer advising the mayor as "chief". Abbas did not accept that the remark related to the expression "too many chiefs, not enough indians". Curiously, it was only the Labour Bangladeshi councillors who were outraged. Bangladeshi Lib Dems, for their part, professed themselves profoundly unoffended.

● **MEANWHILE Tower Hamlets' cosy relationship with consultancy firm Renaissance (*Eyes passim*) continues. Last year we reported how the east London borough had hired Renaissance director Lorraine Langham at a salary of £130,000 a year to field press inquiries into an alleged multi-million pound fraud which is still the subject of a police investigation. Another Renaissance director, John Walker, is working for the council-supported regeneration body, Tower Hamlets partnership. Renaissance was set up in 1997 by Tony O'Regan, shortly after he stepped down as the council's head of communications. Now O'Regan's old job is vacant once more, following the departure of Kate Pierce after only nine months. The vacancy has not been advertised, but has been "put out to tender". A council insider tells the *Eye*: "The only reason they are going through this process is because the councillors made a fuss when they read about the hiring of consultants without tendering in *Private Eye*." Although the "tendering" process is not complete, nobody will be very surprised when Renaissance's Carole McMahon, former head of communications at Hammersmith and Fulham, gets the job.**

BATTLE OF MUGSBOROUGH

The Labour-controlled council has just struck a blow for women's rights by removing three high-powered female staff from its senior management team, resulting in the top seven positions on the authority all being occupied by blokes, at least four of whom are believed to be masons.

In her resignation letter to council leader Jeremy Birch, which was leaked to the local paper, Hastings's award-winning regeneration supremo, Caroline Lwin, decried the council's "bluff boy" culture and wrote that to restrict women to lower managerial posts was "unhealthy and dysfunctional". Shortly after Ms Lwin's job was sidelined she won the 2003 "design champion" award from the government's commission for architecture and the built environment (Cabe) in recognition of her work in Hastings – and promptly landed an £80,000 job up the road in Maidstone. Meanwhile she is bringing a sex discrimination case at an industrial tribunal. Happy days!

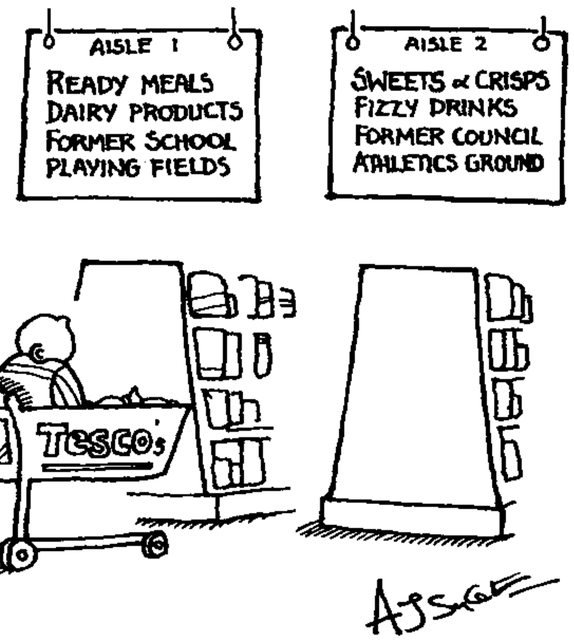
● **A CAMPAIGN to have a future royal navy vessel named HMS *Colchester* has won the unanimous support of councillors of all parties in the Essex town. Nothing wrong with that, even though Colchester is an army town and that in the incredible shrinking British navy there will be far fewer ships needing names in the future. But did the Tory councillor who proposed the motion, Kevin Bentley, really have to pose in the local paper with a "how it might look" model of the future vessel which on closer inspection turns out to be, er, the late German battleship *Bismarck*?**

LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELDS

MORE news arrives of children running out of places to run around outdoors while planners are more than willing to sign off on schemes which develop "alternative sporting use" on playing fields (see last *Eye*).

Ashfield district council has given itself planning permission to spend £11.5m on a six-lane pool, gym, bowls and squash complex. Fantastic stuff for adults and those children can afford to use the centre.

However, the site which is to be developed is a park known as The Lammas which was given to the people of Sutton in 1918 as a pleasure ground for the purpose of outdoor recreation. The centre is to replace two older sports centres in the town which will close in 2007. What chance of those sites being levelled and turned into free-to-use outside playing spaces for kids rather than sold off to developers? No, we didn't think so either.



EDUCASHUN NEWZ

STAFF from a small sub-contractor owed hundreds of thousands of pounds by the collapsed private finance initiative (PFI) firm Ballast UK, have seized back materials from schools in Tower Hamlets.

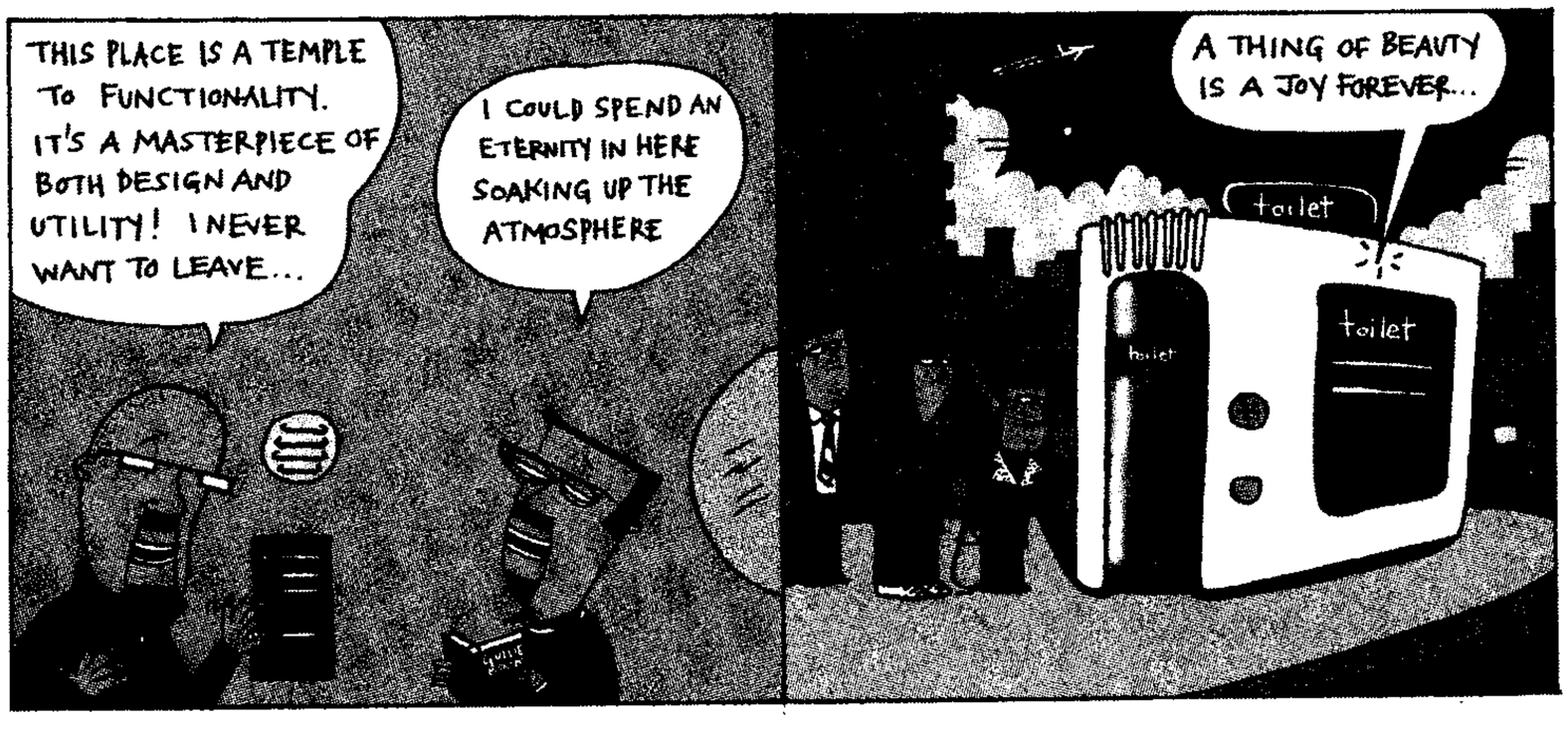
CWS Construction, which was working at Ben Jonson School and Bonner School, snatched back essential equipment during the Christmas holiday period. The firm, which has a total turnover of £1.4m, is owed £320,000 by Ballast UK.

The move follows the repossession of equipment by contractors in six East Lothian schools, also affected by the collapse of Ballast UK (*Eye* 1095). The firm was put into liquidation last October by its Dutch parent company Ballast Nedam. Liquidators say there is only £500,000 left in the kitty to pay creditors a total of £31m. CWS has little chance of seeing any of its £320,000 and dozens of similar firms face the same problem.

Meanwhile in Northamptonshire a £100m schools refurbishment has been put on hold for a full year because Ballast was part of a consortium bidding for the deal.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

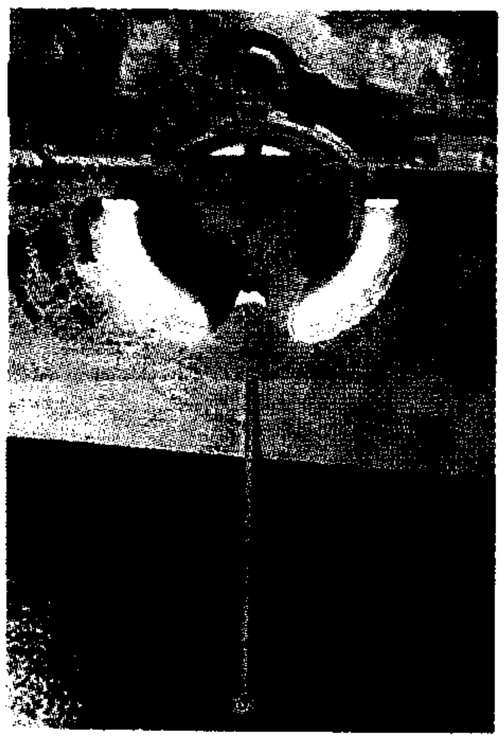

THIS PLACE IS A TEMPLE TO FUNCTIONALITY. IT'S A MASTERPIECE OF BOTH DESIGN AND UTILITY! I NEVER WANT TO LEAVE...
I COULD SPEND AN ETERNITY IN HERE SOAKING UP THE ATMOSPHERE
A THING OF BEAUTY IS A JOY FOREVER...
toilet
toilet
toilet

NOOKS and CORNERS

***AVEAT EMPTOR!* A Hastings estate agent selling a flat in Pelham Crescent, that glorious Regency *terrace* facing the sea, is offering "uninterrupted Channel views from most rooms." But not for long, if Hastings borough council and others have their way.**

Within five years, if all goes to plan, the lucky residents of Pelham Crescent will be able to gaze not on sea and sky, but a spanking new glass masterpiece by that genius of modern British architecture, Milord Norman Foster.

The ability of public authorities to shoot themselves in the foot never ceases to amaze. Hastings certainly needs help; but the best way to help a town is to exploit its assets and the assets of Hastings are its seaside location and its architecture. There are the castle ruins and the tall, timber fishermen's net huts; there are the varied houses of the old town and the Regency terraces and villas of St Leonard's. And there is Pelham Crescent: a concave terrace of charming houses set into the cliffside above the beach in Old Hastings with, in its centre, the Ionic portico of the former church of St Mary-in-the-Castle.



The whole – one of the finest Regency ensembles not just in Hastings but in Britain – was designed in 1824 by Joseph Kay and built by Thomas Pelham, Earl of Chichester. The church was closed in 1970, neglected and flogged off by the church commissioners in 1982 and nearly demolished. But now, thanks to the Friends of St Mary-in-the-Castle and the council, with lottery and European Union money, it has been restored and reopened as an arts centre. All that is now needed is for the flanking terraces to be restored and the seaside shops below the terrace to be improved to re-establish Pelham Crescent as one of Hastings's glories.

Instead it is to be spoiled with the help of public money. The government's South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) set up the Hastings and Bexhill Task Force in 2001 and gave it £38m for regeneration. Last year the task force established Sea Space – Hastings & Bexhill Renaissance Ltd to deliver projects. And the project all these bureaucrats and their consultants wanted was one to emulate the "Bilbao Effect" – a flashy new building by a designer architect, an international superstar, in the naïve belief that it becomes the catalyst for profitable regeneration.

The economic and social consequences of plonking Frank Gehry's tinny Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao are far from understood and not necessarily benign, but never mind. The question is: why does this have to be done in front of Pelham Crescent when there are plenty of other sites in Hastings which could take a good new building?

The site for this "showcase physical development", a "European-style plaza", is an open space; that is, the shingle beach along the seafront which was cynically commandeered years ago by the council for a car park. In October, the people of Hastings were shown designs for "a new office and commercial development" by three trendy firms: Lifschutz Davidson, Foreign Office Architects and the world's favourite: Foster & Partners. Of the three, the visiting public preferred the Foster scheme – but visitors were not allowed to vote on a fourth option: to leave Pelham Crescent alone.

As the fiasco of the British Museum Great Court revealed, Foster's firm should never be let near a serious historic building. Able only to conceive steel and glass structures, their attitude to context and historic buildings is at once arrogant and childish. In Hastings, their response to Pelham Crescent is simply to continue its curve and repeat the rhythm of Kay's convex facades but in glass rather than stucco. The result will be an enclosed circular space with a gap by the shore to allow a framed view of a proposed pier and the sea. Underneath will be a car park.

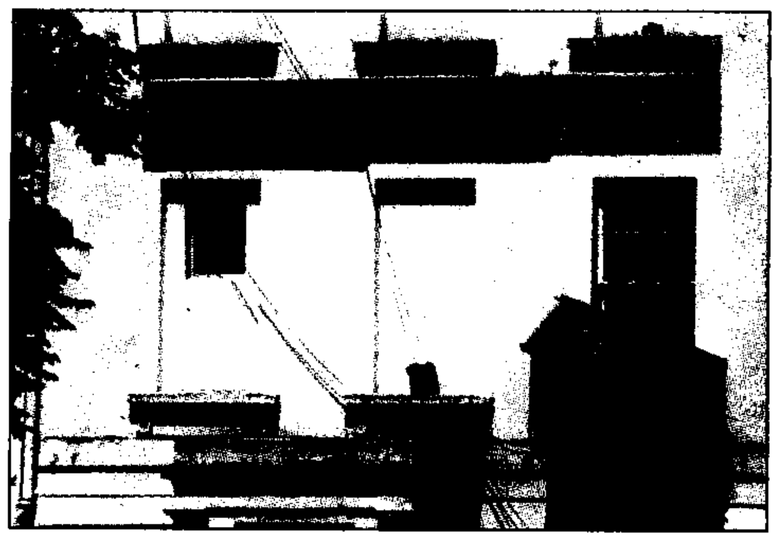
"Imagine it," gushes the council mag. "By 2008 you could be enjoying anything from beach volleyball to outdoor performances in a sheltered and beautiful square [sic], surrounded by the castle, Pelham Crescent and St Mary in the Castle, sipping a cool drink and watching the seashore sights."

What is also easy to imagine is that the residents of Pelham Crescent will no longer be able to see the sea and visitors to Hastings will no longer be able to enjoy the distant and oblique views of the seaside terrace and the church portico that its creators intended, for they will be blocked by the development. The long beach, and the panoramic prospect of seaside architecture, fishing boats and cliffs, will be ruined. Yet further along the seafront are mediocre, obtrusive buildings crying out for replacement.

According to council leader Jeremy Birch: "We need bold physical statements that say Hastings is no longer the town known by some from outside for dereliction, shabbiness and decline. We need them to see it is the town that is transforming, using the very best of current design to complement the very best of our existing buildings." In fact Pelham Crescent will be compromised rather than complemented, and visitors to Hastings will see that it is a town run by pretentious, gullible idiots.

'Piloti'

I-SPY *Central London*



Submitted by Neil A. Dawson. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs.)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

DESPITE its recently acquired street-cred under the name of Making Music, the National Federation of Music Societies is an old charity dedicated to encouraging amateur performance: a worthy cause the society has championed since 1935 under presidents like Thomas Beecham, Ralph Vaughan Williams, and a host of others who have given their time and, often, money.

But these days it seems to work the other way round. Visit the society's website and you'll see that it's running a scheme to mark the 70th birthday of the composer Sir Peter Maxwell Davies who "has invited choirs in membership of Making Music to help him celebrate this unique event".

The invitation is for choirs to send a deposit of £200 each as down payment for a share in the costs of commissioning a choral work from the composer, the final amount to depend on how many choirs respond. In return, each choir will have exclusive rights to perform the piece during the 70th birthday year.

This might sound fair enough, but Maxwell Davies happens to be *Making Music*'s current president, which means he is "inviting" members of his own charitable society to line his pockets: a dubious privilege and with a not insignificant amount of money at stake considering the modest amount of work the commission will demand of him.

The envisaged piece will be a simple (designed for amateurs) setting for four-part choir and piano lasting no more than 15 minutes. The society says it's anticipating at least 70 so-called "exclusive" performances, and that the cost to each choir could be "as little as £260". So that makes over £18,000 minimum. A tidy sum.

Some members of Making Music who feel the initiative might be of interest to the charity commissioners are voting on the matter with their feet. As originally advertised, the opportunity to give Sir Peter a £260 birthday present closed at the end of last summer. But the new issue of the Making Music newsletter, dated December, tells everyone in desperately upbeat terms that they still have a "Last Chance to Be Involved!" In other words, not enough choirs have rushed to their cheque books, and it looks like poor Sir Peter will be celebrating quietly.

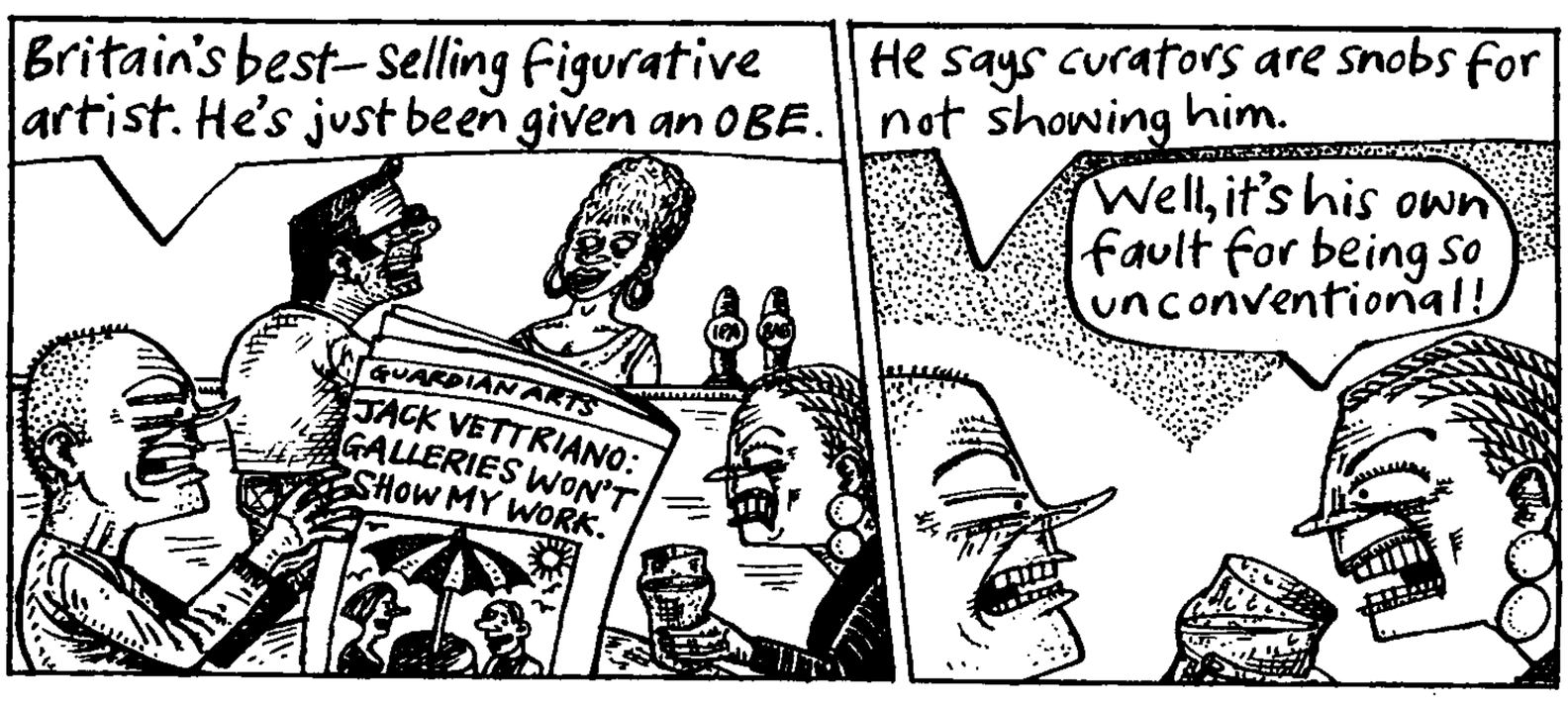
'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

FOLLOWING our item in *Eye* 1095 about cellist Simon Isserlis hitting a member of the audience with a bunch of flowers after the man fell asleep during a Dvorak cello concerto, Isserlis has written at length about the incident in the *Guardian*.

"Of course I was far more pleased to be featured in *Private Eye* than I was annoyed by the inaccuracy of its reporting," he says, explaining that he didn't hit the man about the head with the flowers but simply tossed them petulantly into his lap after taking his bow.

The man with the lolling head did then wake up and smile, only to promptly fall asleep again.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS BY BIRCH


Britain's best-selling figurative artist. He's just been given an OBE.
GUARDIAN ARTS
JACK VETTRIANO: GALLERIES WON'T SHOW MY WORK.
He says curators are snobs for not showing him.
Well, it's his own fault for being so unconventional!

DOWN ON THE FARM

IF you thought the debacle outlined in *Private Eye's Not the Foot and Mouth Report* was bad, a landslide defeat for Defra in the high court has just blown wide open one of the biggest scandals remaining from the 2001 FMD disaster: the ministry's astonishing refusal to pay hundreds of contractors £100m still owing for work done to Defra/Maff's instructions when the crisis was at its height.

The court ordered Defra to pay JDM Accord £5m it had been owed for nearly three years for building the notorious Ash Moor burial pit in Devon, designed to hold 500,000 dead animals and never used. But JDM's victory has only highlighted the hundreds of other cases.

Typical has been the nightmare faced by Luke Furse Earthmoving Ltd, a Devon contracting firm run for 25 years by Mr Furse and his wife. Shortly after the crisis hit Devon, the firm responded so efficiently to a call to build one of the county's huge pyres of infected animals that it soon became one of Maff's major allies. Eventually Furse Earthmoving was responsible for organising and constructing more than 40 pyres.

At every step the company acted under the instructions of Maff officials, and all payments were agreed, recorded and counter-signed until, when the crisis was finally over, the time came for accounts to be settled. Only then, as months went by, did it gradually emerge that something had gone hideously wrong.

During the six months of the crisis, Maff ordered spending as if there were no tomorrow, knowing that, under EU law, a large part of the bill would eventually be picked up by the European commission. But as the dust settled, commission officials began to hint that they were not happy with the way Maff had been throwing money around. Farmers had been paid too much in compensation (since much of the "cull" had been illegal, this was thought necessary to buy off their protests). Too much had been spent in every direction.

In 2002 and 2003 it gradually became clear that Defra was finding any excuse not to pay the money it owed to hundreds of contractors, including Furse Earthmoving. Half a million invoices and other documents which the firm supplied to Defra were mysteriously "lost". Quibbles were raised about the tiniest details of spending. Typical was the way, during the crisis, Maff had ordered that each of the firm's employees must be supplied with two sets of wellies, so that one could be disinfected while the other was in use.

But Defra now said this was not necessary. What made the nightmare only more alarming was to discover through the Forum of Private Business that countless other firms were being treated in the same way. Defra's refusal to pay its debts was clearly based on a strategy concerted from the highest level. Only this month, when MPs tried to raise the scandal in the Commons, with one MP waving a local newspaper report of the Furse case, the minister Alun Michael continued to stonewall. But now, with JDM's court victory, Defra's tactics have been comprehensively ruled as illegal.

'Muckspreader'

"Woogforde ate a lot of things we would not eat today. Remember his foot had to be cooked over a fire with chimneys that smoked.

Eastern Daily Press

THE FUGGING TRUTH

6 January 2004: Fulham FC chairman Mohamed Fayed gives fans an unequivocal assurance: "Obviously he [Sir Alex Ferguson of Manchester United] needs a top-quality striker urgently but he can't have mine. I have a clear message to Sir Alex and anyone else who is interested: Read my lips, Louis Saha is not for sale."

18 January: Mohamed Fayed confirms that agreement has been reached "in principle" for the transfer of Louis Saha to Manchester United.

Down On The Fish Farm

IT WOULD be easy to crow the "*Eye* told you so" – but it did. For five long years, Old Trout has been highlighting the potentially harmful effects of eating farmed salmon. And now a group of American scientists has published a peer-reviewed report in *Scientist*, one of the world's leading science journals, confirming that eating too much farm salmon might seriously damage your health.

Old Trout's advice remains the same: give Scottish farmed salmon, smoked or otherwise, a miss; and take the official denials that anything's wrong with a large pinch of salt.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is reassuring the public that farm salmon contaminants are below its own recommended safety levels and below those of the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the American Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The Scottish executive (SE) says the report doesn't tell it anything it didn't know already.

However, Sir John Krebs, FSA chief executive, admits that it is eight years since UK tests were carried out on salmon contaminants. WHO research is even older and the US FDA has to take commercial considerations into account. The scientists engaged in this study, by contrast, have been bound by disciplines imposed by the US Environmental Agency and their findings are based on science alone.

So has the SE admitted the error of its ways? No. Instead, and despite the fact the industry is in meltdown through low prices and over production, the SE is working on a plan to help fish farmers out of their present difficulty. As banks pull the plug and refuse to lend them money, the SE is proposing to guarantee fish farm losses to the tune of £100m.

Allan Wilson, SE fisheries minister, thinks this is justified because of the importance to Scotland of fish farm jobs. He claims the industry supports 6,500 of them; but the figure relies on information gathered six years ago. Even one of his senior civil servants, Gordon Hart, admits the figure is just an "indicator".

Before underwriting fish farm losses, first minister Jack McConnell has been asked to set up an independent inquiry to establish the true number of fish farm jobs. Responding, Gordon Hart said: "Neither the ministerial Working Group for Aquaculture nor public sector bodies have identified a requirement for the commissioning of such a survey. Accordingly, there is little prospect of the executive committing public funding to a project of this nature in the immediate future."

Still, to be fair to Gordon, this dictat was made before Scottish farmed salmon was fingered as being the most contaminated in the world. No doubt he and his fish farm chums will even now be in solemn conclave trying to decide how to explain why £100m can be found to help fish farmers when the SE can't spare a few thousands to find out how many people the fish farmers employ.

'Old Trout'

● **"ONLY EAT SALMON THREE TIMES A YEAR" was the Daily Mail's advice, emblazoned across its front page, following a report by toxicologists in the US which suggested the fish was contaminated with cancer-causing chemicals.**

Those unsure of how best to use the fish in their diets could turn to page 80 of the same day's paper where the "Recipe of the Day" was for *Salmon en Papillote*.

Pseuds Corner

In a weird way I see it as a form of duty. My generation is probably never going to be called upon to fight a war. So it's important occasionally to test ourselves in other ways.

JAMES DELINGPOLE on hunting, *Sunday Times*

CHAPMAN – On Christmas Day 2003, to Janette (nee Cousins) and Richard, a daughter, Mistletoe Betty Berengaria, a darling sister for Thomas, Felicity and Araminta.

***Daily Telegraph* birth announcements**

Finally, I close my eyes. I allow my mind to relax – I'm telling you this, hoping you might try it too as you read – and, as if drawing the internal movie camera back to get a wide-angle view, I become aware of the bigger picture – the 6.2bn people along with all the other members of creation on all their respective strata of existence, and breathing deeply, slowly and evenly, I allow myself to feel, viscerally, the human condition in its entirety – the birth, the growing, the death, the pain of those who suffer, the joy of those who celebrate, the ecstasy of those in the throes of orgasm, the satisfaction of those with bellies replete – I feel it all, as if it's happening within me.

I spend a moment or two like this, internally being with everyone, then say 'I love you', not once but three times, so that I really feel that love. I follow this with, 'I wish you peace', and finally, 'Happy New Year!', just as it would appear I'm saying to you now: 'Happy New Year! I wish you peace. I love you, I love you, I love you!'

BAREFOOT DOCTOR
Observer Magazine

I'm really interested in cycle couriers at the moment. They have an underground code, they're mobile, they're nowhere but everywhere at once – kind of omnipresent but anonymous.

ZOË LAZARUS (leading-edge trend analyst), *Observer Magazine*

Curatorial In-Securities: New Media Art & Rhizomatic Instability

Under suspicion and in-secure, we find ourselves suspended in-between the conditions of "digital terror" itself. It is precisely this state of "being always-between" that demands our artistic and curatorial attention when we retreat from digital speed to reflect on the indecisive cultural delays and fleshy messes rendered by the new global media systems and their various remote controls...

Recent digital installations make evident how powerfully the interiorising machineries of digital scansion and registration can coalesce to challenge the cultural dominance of scopic visibility with creative zones of delirious intensity. At issue in such art work is a cross-registration of procedures of "transfer" and "transference" as registered on the ever-changing scene of multi-media installation.

Lecture given at King's College London by PROFESSOR TIMOTHY MURRAY, Professor of Comparative Literature & English, Cornell University

CONTRIBUTORS: David Johnson, Hilary Bell, Anon, Irisz Zsoldos, Jimmy Jacobs

Letters

Proven lawyer

Sir,

Your "Fuckwatch" diatribe against the lately deceased libel lawyer is entirely fair, as I can confirm from many battles with him. You showed great restraint in not mentioning the many cases he pursued against your own organ when I was its lawyer throughout the 70s, and afterwards. Carter-Ruck missed few opportunities of extracting exorbitant costs from client and opponent alike. We kept them down only by encouraging the belief – by no means unjustified – that if he pushed too hard the Eye would cheat him of his fees by closing down. Often, he tempted us to settle by offering to take far less than the going rate of damages for his client in return for agreeing not to question his inflated fee. The Law Society Council, of which Carter-Ruck was a member, declined to ban this blatantly dishonest practice.

GEOFFREY BINDMAN,

London WC1.

No Marks for accuracy

Sir,

Your routinely robust "Doing The Rounds" column was let down by your report (Eye 1097) that most of the doctors who signed up to a 1997 statement of support for Labour's health policy have changed their minds. Professor Marks says 90 percent of the doctors he contacted did not support the creation of NHS foundation hospitals or treatment centres.

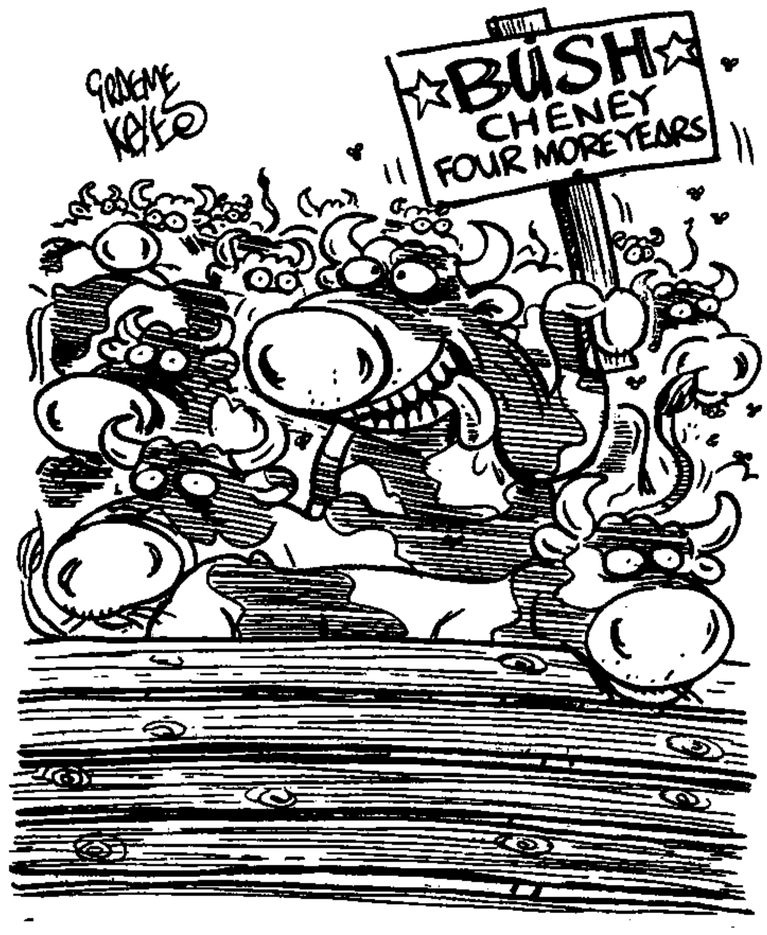
For the sake of accuracy, this week's Health Service Journal reports that in fact only 31 (or 52 percent) of the 60 signatories contacted were opposed to (just two of) the government's NHS reforms.

I work on the NHS frontline where the reality is very different to the picture Professor Marks paints. I and my colleagues are broadly supportive of Labour's reforms for the simple reason that after two decades of wither and drift, hard cash is now coming in, waiting lists are falling and we are winning back the confidence of our patients.

Yours faithfully,
DR SIMON GOLDENBERG,

London E1.

Mad Cow Identified In U.S.



Norman conquest

Sir,

Re: Police 5 (1097). Stop having a pop at PC Norman Brennan. Yes he is a bit of a renta-quote, but at least he is prepared to put his head above the parapet with what he says – not having a gong to worry about losing like our chiefs. You criticise him for advertising himself as an expert in the criminal justice system. He probably sees more of it as a constable than many higher-ranking officers. Did you know he got second-hand body armour shipped across from the US for the cops here prior to it being issued in the UK? There are hundreds of do-gooder charities assisting offenders, so if Stormin' Norman sets up the Victims of Crime Trust, good on him.

PC KNACKER,

South Yorkshire Plods.

Sir,

Well, what a surprise! Someone at Private Eye has taken a dislike to Norman Brennan on the grounds that they believe the head of the Victims of Crime Trust doesn't have the authority to speak on behalf of the victims of crime.

This week a penal reformer was on television saying that no women should ever be jailed. Who appointed them? We saw the distraught mother of a teenage girl who had committed suicide in prison. I thought it quite sad. That was until I learned that the girl was serving a pathetic 18-month sentence for manslaughter, having harassed a 72-year-old man for money until he had a heart attack. That's where your writer splits apart from the majority population. He would still be sad about the girl. I wasn't.

The Victims Of Crime Trust is a true charity. It runs on the proceeds of public donation. Unlike so many of the offenders' charities, which are funded by taxpayers and lottery players.

What's the justification for Norman Brennan talking about crime? Twenty-five years as a serving police officer, and viewing the consequences. What's yours?

Yours faithfully,
NEIL SAUNDERS,

Burgess Hill, W. Sussex.

Lookalike

Beardsley

Crook

Sir,

Has anyone else noticed the startling similarity between Mackenzie Crook (Gareth Keenan in The Office) and the Victorian artist Aubrey Beardsley? Are their barbers related? I think we should be told.

Yours faithfully,
STAWELL HEARD,

London SE3.

Tranquil Bridgewaters

Sir,

How dare you impugn our good taste (Scenes You Seldom See, 1097)? The Bridgewaters, at least not these, have never sent out a round robin, and never will.

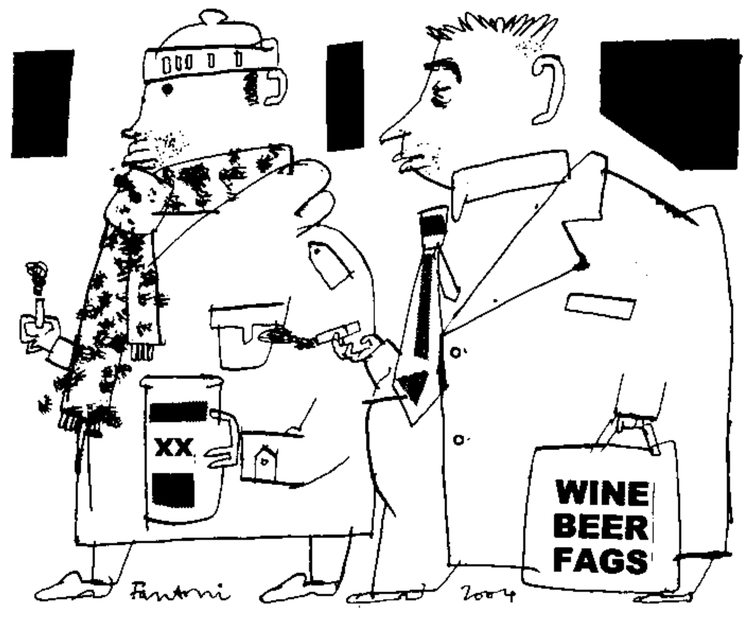
ALAN BRIDGEWATER,

Oxford.

CHRISTMAS TREE only two weeks since cut, still a few needles left, make a nice feature £5

Cornish Times (9.1.04)

Scenes You Seldom See



"I'm bursting for a piss, but since there are no toilets around here, I'll just have to hold on till I get home"

Riches from rags

Sir,

In your reports of BBC hacks (or as the late Sir Robin Day affectionately called them, "media spivs") earning a crust writing for newspapers, you coyly forgot to mention that most of the rags they contribute to are totally anti-public service broadcasting.

Yours,
MIKE MITCHELL,

Hove, E. Sussex.

LSO baton charge

Sir,

I was delighted to read Lunchtime O'Boulez's tribute to the LSO's world class standing, as we launch our centenary at such a high point in the orchestra's history. This only increased my disappointment that s/he should then have given a platform to fabricated claims that bear no relation to reality.

The reality is that the LSO's "spectacular new education-centre-cum rehearsal, recording and chamber-concert space" is a huge success and generating extensive (and increasing) demand from orchestras (ENO, LPO, ECO, OAE etc); promoters and media for performances, rehearsals and recordings. These include BBC TV, Radio 2 and 3, Channel 4, the South Bank Show, Barbican, international soloists, EMI and Classic FM, etc. I hope you will agree that this list answers your point about the acoustics!

It is no surprise that the final £18m cost of LSO St Luke's was a massive undertaking for an organisation with a turnover of £10m pa. I don't understand why such a challenge, undertaken and met, is a subject for anything other than applause for the remarkable group of people who made the impossible happen! The only further costs (to which you refer, which have not been hidden from anyone, least of all our players) are £400,000 for work on some wall delamination that none of the experts foresaw. This work will be undertaken only if/when that money has been raised.

The enlightened commitment of the current lord mayor through his appeal 2004, "Music and the Arts for everyone", to help to underpin the future of the LSO Discovery (music education) programme for which LSO St Luke's was built, as well as a number of other important arts organisations' education programmes, has nothing to do with the cost of building the centre and is worthy of great praise, not knocking! Here's to the LSO's next 100 years, and the central part that LSO St Luke's will play in bringing great music to people throughout the UK, and long may the LSO continue to be led by its ambition to do extraordinary things! If, as claimed, this makes LSO St Luke's a white elephant, please could we have a herd of them!

CLIVE GILLINSON,

Managing Director, LSO.

Matt finish

Sir,

Ed Curthoys' recent missive regarding Leeds fans was a little muddled. I recall the furore surrounding the disrupted one-minute's silence in Sir Matt Busby's memory. Elland Road was eerily silent. This is due in part to the fact that Leeds were playing against Blackburn Rovers at Ewood Park that day. And yes, a sizeable proportion of the away fans behaved like the pond scum we know them to be.

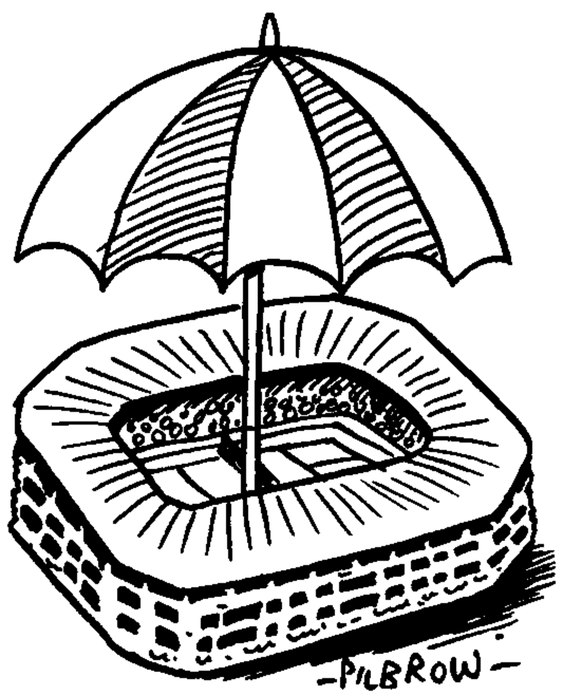
Perhaps I have an advantage over Mr Curthoys of being grudgingly aware that most clubs have a crop of these idiots without making the rather obvious mistake of defending their reprehensible actions. Incidentally, I would not want to fuel the fires in the endless jihad between Man U and Leeds fans, but my guess is that parading a mock coffin emblazoned with the words "HA HA" on the death of Don Revie made future events a little bit more predictable.

The Coventry fan who made the assertion that police time has been taken up with Leeds fans over the last few years might want to check the league tables. You do not tend to have that many fixtures with a team if you are in a different division.

Yours sportingly,
R. O'SHEA,

Via email.

The Roof Plans For Wimbledon Centre Court



Sir,

*In his letter purporting "utter disbelief" at the claim that Leeds United supporters – what? **all** of them!? – are not racist (1097), Ed Curthoys himself imparts the similarly fantastical assertion that "[w]hen Matt Busby died, every ground in the country held a perfectly observed minute's silence, with the exception of Elland Road".*

In fact Highbury, where I was watching Arsenal at that exact time, also attempted to hold one but were prevented from doing so by various obscene and derogatory shouts which emanated from a small minority of visiting Oldham supporters on the day.

Yours,
AN ARSENAL SUPPORTER,

Name and address withheld.

Swanning around

Sir,

As a York City fan it is not generally my custom to rush to support Scarborough, but your I-Spy picture of a bridge in the town bearing the sign "All Swans Under Main Arch" (1097) is not all it would seem. The sign is on a bridge over the lake in Peasholme Park, a popular attraction. In addition to its renowned miniature warship battles during summer months, the lake also features pedal-boats for hire, some of which take the form of swans. As the lesser arches of the bridge are too low to be easily navigated by these high-necked craft, occupants of the swans need to steer through the central arch. Hence the sign is cygn-ificant.

Yours sincerely,
(CLLR) GREG STONE,

Newcastle upon Tyne.

Talking botox

Sir,

You know you shouldn't have published the following in Colemanballs: "People should be reminded that America's reason for going to war was weapons of mass destruction. So far, all they've found is a tiny bit of botox."

*What the Stop The War spokesman said was what he meant to say, and is correct. Strange as it may seem Botox **is** botulinum toxin. The muscle paralyser that is the most toxic substance known, can in appropriate dosage, be used medically and cosmetically.*

Best regards,
ROBIN HARDY-KING,

Folkestone.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"Last season was dark times for Swansea City but now with Lee Trundle they can see some light at the end of the rainbow."
IAN WALSH, Match of the Day
(Sion Davies)

"Macclesfield Town, with an opportunity to put the icing on the Christmas cracker..."
ADAM BRAZENDALE, ITV1
(Robin Walters)

"It's the homosexual kiss in the middle of the film that has really got tongues wagging."
RACHEL HARVEY, Radio 4
(Celia Darbyshire)

"Whether Gordon Strachan is taking a sabbatical or will come back, we'll have to see."
BRYAN ROBSON, Radio 5 Live
(Ian Cade)

"Some of our customers find it very daunting coming to a weight loss advisory meeting. For some of them, it's difficult even to get through the door."
Weightwatchers spokesman, Radio 4
(Tim Budds)

Union dues

Sir,

Strawbfan is talking out of his fundamental orifice when he claims "Part of the Union" was written by Rick Hudson and John Ford c. 1972 (1097).

It is, as correctly claimed in a previous Eye, an "old trade union song". It was originally entitled "Union Maid" and dates back at least to the 40s when Pete Seeger penned the anti-big industry lyric to a traditional American folk tune as commentary on the union problems in the US of that time.

I know this because a folk group I played with recorded the song in the late 50s. There were a few disbelieving intakes of breath amongst older musos when The Strawbs tweaked the lyrics, slowed the tempo and claimed ownership.

But it was hardly a first. A certain Mr. L. Donegan plundered great chunks of American folk and blues heritage which were credited on his records as "New words and music by L. Donegan" because no copyright existed.

Even Lennon was not averse to a little plagiarism. The tune to "Happy Christmas/War is Over" is a complete lift from the old American folk song "Stewball". There are a multitude of similar examples but nobody ever seems to care.

Stawbfan should do a little research before committing himself to print.

Sincerely,
DON HURLEY,

Via email.

Hart of the matter

Sir,

I apologise for not having replied earlier to J.H. Brindle's intriguing letter continuing the debate about the origins of Attila the Hun (1096).

*Brindle is right to question the likelihood of the name "Attila" deriving from the Old Germanic for "little father", a theory which I ascribed in my original letter (Eye 1095) to "certain irresponsible philologists", among whose number I would certainly not like myself to be included. However, Brindle's fascinating suggestion that "Attila" might be derived from "atly", meaning "inseparable from a horse", seems to me to offer, as it were, a philological Third Way which might satisy everybody. "Atly" is, furthermore, eerily and perhaps significantly reminiscent of the name under which Attila appears, in dim folk memory, as 'Atli,' in later texts such as the Nibelungenlied, as well as in Norse legends such as the Volsunga Saga, the Second Lay of **

Yours faithfully,
DR CHRISTOPHER HART,

Via email.

(*Sadly, this letter had to be cut for reasons of space. Ed.)

Letter from **Ramallah**

from Our Own Correspondent

EUROPEANS have shown a strange attachment to our part of the world for centuries. These days, we look to them to balance the US and its efforts to fall over itself in support of Israel. And we are anxious.

Under Italy's presidency, which ended last month, the European Union for the first time insisted that acts against Israel should be included in UN condemnations of terror. Trade links with Syria were restored. Bilateral visits and exchanges between Israel and Rome are increasing. Worst of all, the EU wants to take away our sovereign right to poison the minds of our children against Israel and the Jews.

Italy has been working with Belgium, the UN educational, scientific and cultural organisation (UNESCO) and others to provide funds to replace the old, virulently anti-Semitic Jordanian and Egyptian textbooks that were being used in Palestinian schools. A new education, they said, to give the new generation a better chance of peace. Our dismay has been only been partially mollified by the EU's conclusion that while the new books were "not perfect", they were an improvement "constituting a valuable contribution to the education of young Palestinians".

Happily these improvements do not go so far as to eliminate altogether the more subtle forms of anti-Semitism. And while they may not be as perfect as our old texts, the new books do at least still deny the historical association of Jews with the holy land and the existence of Israel as a state. They encourage the concept that all of the territory from the Jordan river to the Mediterranean (including Israel) is Palestine and – quite rightly for impressionable young minds in our volatile environment – that martyrdom is a high ideal to be strived for and achieved by every child.

Quite how UNESCO squares these books with its own guidelines over the rights of children to a proper education is its own affair. We are just glad that our children are learning to look forward to a Jew-free Palestine from the Jordan to the Med – from books with a dedication in this year's editions thanking Italy, Belgium, UNESCO and others for their professional and financial assistance in producing them.

It is a curriculum that sits well with other efforts to groom the new generation. This "new geography" of the Middle East is also taught at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) Teachers' Training College in Ramallah.

Palestinian schoolchildren reaching grade 11 this year will fully understand where all this internationally-sponsored education is leading, when they receive "Islamic Culture". This newly printed text (paid for out of the EU-supported Palestinian Administration budget) will oblige them to embrace jihad – "use of physical force" – against anyone who does not wish to convert to Islam, and to execute anyone converting out of Islam. Jihad, the schoolchild will be told, is a personal duty when "the enemy is present in a Muslim country". From their previous years at school, we can be confident that even in these enlightened times, they will know who must be engaged in battle.

It was weaselly Italy, which felt so strongly about these bold steps towards a hate-free school system for Palestinians, that lobbied the World Bank to withdraw funding from the project three years ago. The money was diverted into other initiatives and other European countries immediately stepped into the breach. We can only hope that as Ireland takes the reins of the EU, there will be a similar commitment to the long-term measures we need to open the minds of our young people to the possibility of real peace.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "I admit that the friends we provide are not very talkative," Susanne Schmidt told reporters at her offices in Berlin, "but think of the positive side. They are good-looking, guaranteed not to argue with you, promise to be there all the time, and don't leave dirty dishes, pick their noses, or argue over the TV remote control. In fact, their only disadvantage is that they're just two-dimensional photographs pasted onto the wall, but hey, nobody's perfect."

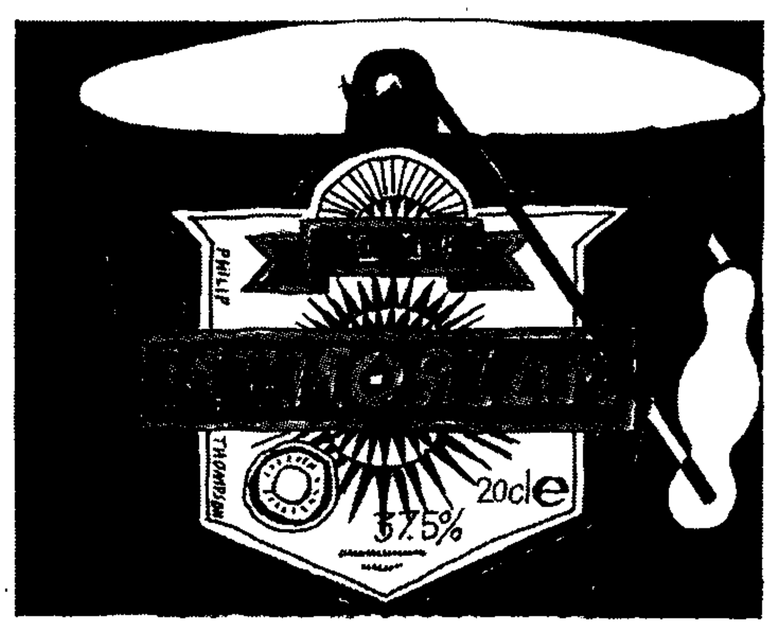
Earlier, Schmidt and her co-designer Andrea Baum had unveiled the latest additions to their Singles wallpaper range, which has become a best-seller in Germany. "We came up with the idea after reading about those CDs of toilets flushing and vacuum cleaners sucking that lonely Americans put on, so they can pretend there's someone else in the house with them. We thought the same thing could be done visually, with life-size pictures of well-groomed people that you can stick on the wall and talk to. Each fake friend is acting out four different scenes – in the kitchen, living room, bathroom, and bedroom – so if you buy the complete wallpaper set, you can have them in every room in the house. We've been amazed at how well they've sold, and we're now planning to create personalised partner wallpaper, for couples who work apart and only see each other at weekends." *(Euronews, 5/1/04. Spotter: Peter Owen)*

– ● –

● *"Russia is traditionally an alcohol-hardened nation," deputy prosecutor general Sergei Lubenets told a press conference in Volgodonsk, "but even by our standards, this competition was deeply irresponsible. So far there's been one death, four others are fighting for their lives in the local hospital, and a dozen other contestants only survived because they were rushed to a clinic for an emergency stomach pump. Yet so far we're at a complete loss to find any criminal charge that we can bring against the organisers."*

Lubenets was speaking after a vodka-drinking marathon contest in southern Russia had resulted in an epidemic of alcohol poisoning, and at least one fatality. "About fifty people took part in the event at a local food and drink shop. Each contestant was given a bucket of vodka, filled to the brim, and a half-litre glass, and told to drink an entire glassful each time a bell was sounded. By the fifth round, most of the participants had fallen over and were unconscious, but Alexander Nakonechny kept on refilling and draining his glass, and threw up his hands in celebration when he was declared the winner. The prize was ten bottles of vodka, but after taking a celebratory swig from the first bottle, he shouted out 'I have shat myself' and dropped dead on the spot.

"Over 40,000 Russians die each year from alcohol poisoning, and the last thing our society needs is competitions that encourage more of this ridiculous drinking. If we can find grounds to charge the organisers, then we'll prosecute them,



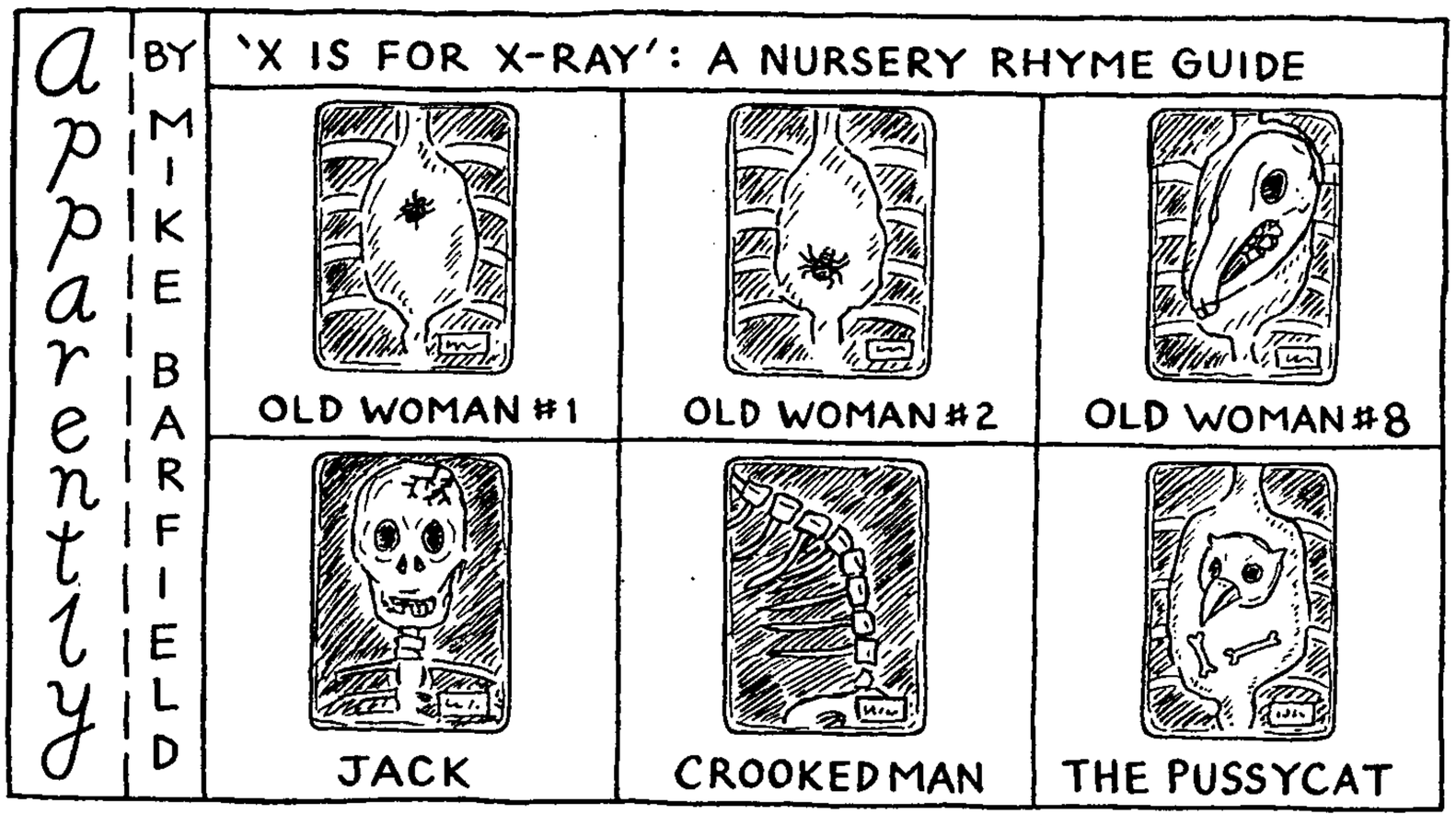
but let's face it. If people are reckless enough to enter a contest than involves drinking themselves to death, it's hard to blame anyone else for their stupidity." (Baltic Times, 27/11/03. Spotter: Mike Edmeades)

– ● –

● "We weren't being brave, we just couldn't understand what he wanted," staff at a bookmaker's shop told the High Court in Glasgow. "He pointed what looked like a gun at us and kept saying 'give me the money or...' but he had a speech impediment, and couldn't finish the sentence. We knew he was up to no good, so we pushed the alarm button, but he was still spluttering and stammering when the police arrived to arrest him, so he never got his money."

Earlier, prosecutor Peter Hammond had described what happened when Thomas McPherson, 40, had tried to rob the William Hill bookmakers in Copland Road, Ibrox. "He kept trying to say 'give me the money or you're going to get it,' but his stutter got worse, and the women tellers couldn't make out what he was saying. In his frustration, he climbed onto the counter and banged on the anti-bandit screen, trying to be understood. Eventually, the women realised that he wanted money, but they'd already pressed the alarm and he was still banging on the screen and stammering when the police arrived with CS gas canisters and batons."

McPherson admitted charges of attempted robbery and threatening behaviour, and was jailed for six years. *(Glasgow Herald, 20/11/03. Spotter: Graham Reaves)*



THE SUN

Hands Off Rebekah's Boobs!

IF the Sun's editor wants to make a tit of herself attacking Clare Short then why should the killjoys stop her!

If she wants to make her newspaper look ugly and stupid then it is no business of anyone else!

If Rebekah wants to demonstrate that she's a prize arse then good luck to her!

After all, it's what the Sun is famous for! Rebekah's boobs are a fine British tradition that we should all be proud of and fight to keep!

Here's a picture of what Rebekah would look like if she were the same age as Clare Short and the Sun had stuck HER head on someone's body instead of Clare's!

Talk about a Bum idea to try and rescue falling sales figures! It's the bottom of the barrel!

Daily Mail

Have You Noticed That The Days Are Getting Longer?

asks Sir Max Hastings, Britain's Top Columnist

HAVE YOU noticed that, since Christmas, the days are getting longer? And that means more daylight for everyone!

Hasn't that got to be good news for all of us? Except of course for those oddballs and weirdos who actually like the dark.

Personally, I actually *(cont. p. 94)*

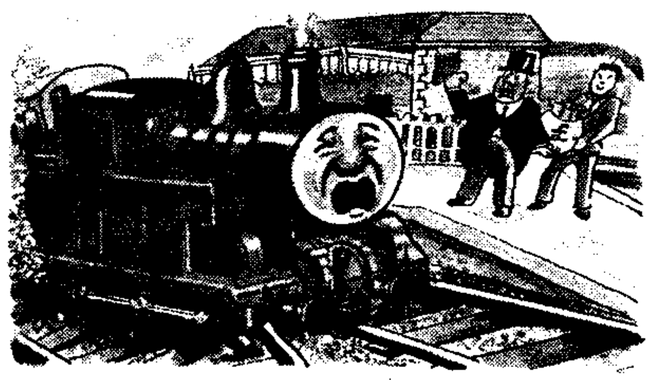
© Hastingstrash Productions 2004.

THOMAS THE PRIVATISED TANK ENGINE

BY THE REV. TAWDRY

"I'VE had a brilliant idea," said the Fat Controller.

"What's that?" said Thomas.

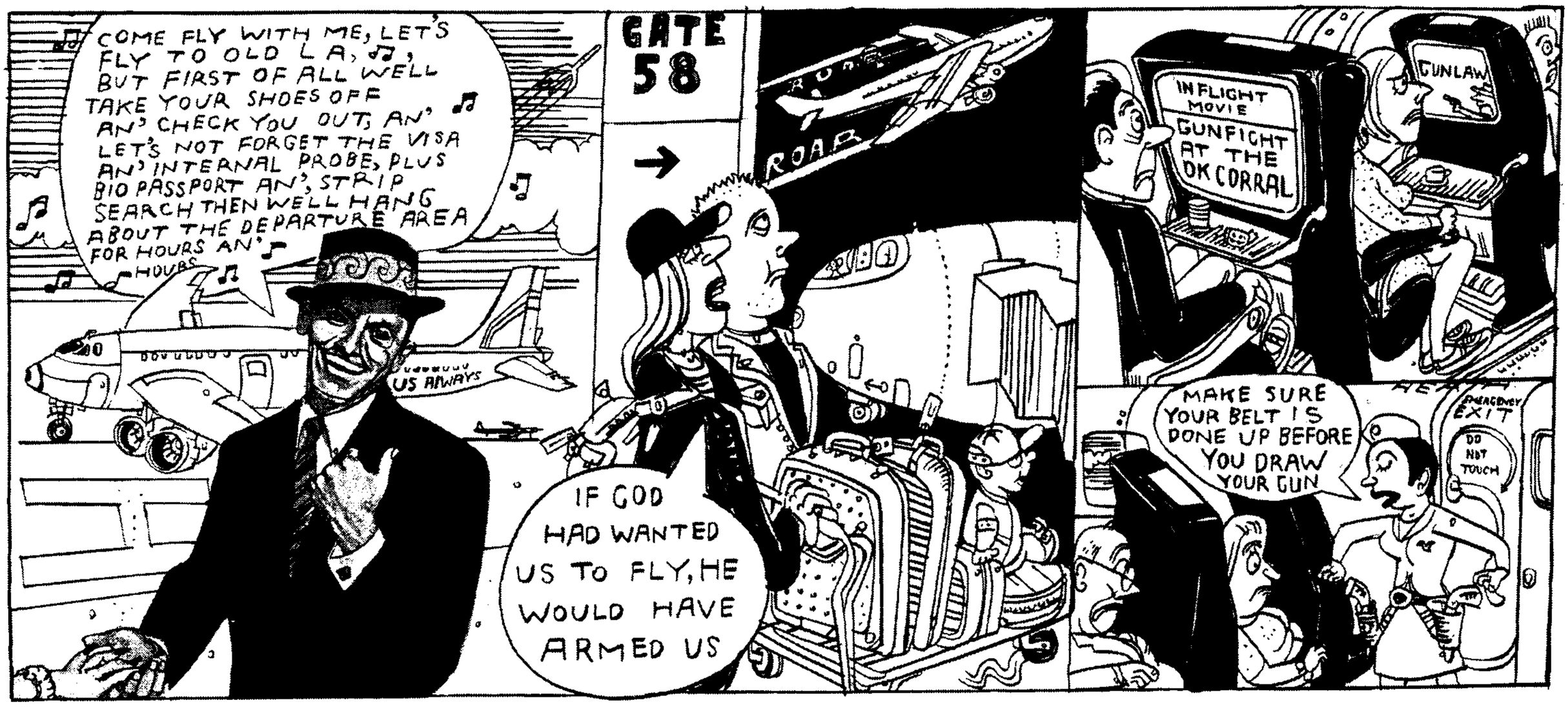


"I think that the trains and the track should be run by the same company. That way, it would have an interest in making sure both parts worked properly."

"That's the way we used to do it," sighed Thomas. "I've been telling you this for years."

"Oh dear," said the Fat Controller. "Even my ideas are late."

© The Rev. Tawdry Blair 2003.


COME FLY WITH ME, LET'S FLY TO OLD L A, ♫, BUT FIRST OF ALL WELL TAKE YOUR SHOES OFF AN' CHECK YOU OUT, AN' LET'S NOT FORGET THE VISA AN' INTERNAL PROBE, PLUS BIO PASSPORT AN', STRIP SEARCH THEN WELL HANG ABOUT THE DEPARTURE AREA FOR HOURS AN' HOURS
US AIRWAYS
GATE 58
ROAR
IF GOD HAD WANTED US TO FLY, HE WOULD HAVE ARMED US
IN FLIGHT MOVIE
GUNFIGHT AT THE OK CORRAL
GUNLAW
MAKE SURE YOUR BELT IS DONE UP BEFORE YOU DRAW YOUR GUN
EMERGENCY EXIT
DO NOT TOUCH

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

Of course there's been only one talking point in the parish in recent days, and that was my guest-appearance as a top DJ on our local hospital radio's most popular morning show "Good Morning Bedblockers!"

For those of you who missed it, my performance was so enjoyed by everyone who heard it that I know that some of you would like to be able to read the highlights of the programme in "print form"!

So here it is.

VICAR: Hi everyone! It's Tony here, your vicar, taking over for the next two hours here on Radio St Albion's FM93.86... have I got that right, Steve?... ha, ha, ha... so here goes, give us a call on 0202 0202, and you can ask me absolutely anything you like, so long as it's been cleared beforehand! I'm sure you'll all agree that's fair?

So let's go to our first caller, Daniel from Tesco Road.

CALLER: Good morning, Vicar, how are you?

VICAR: I'm very well, thanks! Next caller.

CALLER: No, no, that wasn't my question! My question is, why do so many people in the parish seem to want you to quit – because of your views on the war and the students and pretty well everything?

VICAR: Well, Daniel, that's a very good point, and certainly something I'm prepared to think about and take another look at. Next caller.

CALLER: It's Sandra from Asda Drive. Vicar, what I want to know is, is it true it was you who told everyone about our local GP Dr Kelly?

VICAR: Well, thanks Sandra, that's a very good question and you deserve an answer, which I'm sure Mr Hutton will be only to pleased to give you in due course. But until then, obviously, it's not for me to comment. OK?

And now it's time for the latest traffic news. Is that right Steve? Is that what I do now?

MUFFLED VOICE: Yes, get on with it, Vicar. I told you we shouldn't have had him on!

VICAR: Well, I'm afraid there's a bit of a tailback building up on the Somerfields Roundabout, stretching right back to the Texaco turn-off, which means that most of the parish is gridlocked, except for the toll road, which is closed! And I'm afraid the news about the trains is not too good either, since they've all been cancelled, as have the buses. Is that alright? And now our next caller is Peter from the Handy Mandy Agency.

CALLER: Hi Vicar, I'm a caller not a quitter! Ha, ha, ha!

VICAR: Ha, ha, ha! And now, with the time coming up to 12.00, it's time for me, your vicar, to hand back to the guy who really knows what he's doing – not that I don't! – Dave Durkin. All yours, Dave. How did I do?

DAVE: Don't give up the day job, Vicar, although a lot of people obviously want you to, ha, ha, ha!

Pretty impressive, I'm sure you'll all agree! Not my opinion, obviously, but that of an impartial observer, Treasurer Mr Brown, who said after the show that I was almost as good as Alan Partridge!

Pretty high praise, I'm sure you'll agree!

And it's only two weeks since I was compared to Mr Bean on the famous Simpsons show!

I'd better be careful, or I might get big-headed, which I wouldn't obviously, because I'm not that sort of guy!

DJ Tony 'Tony Blackburn' Blair!

Theology for Modern Man

Our Beliefs Explained

No 94: Totality

A number of you have noticed that I have recently taken to using this word "totality" in my sermons, and have asked me to explain its full doctrinal significance.

The word comes from the Greek "totus" meaning "everything", and "litus" meaning "meaning". So, basically, we can define the word as "the entire meaning" of something.

For example, if someone says "I had nothing to do with giving out Dr Kelly's name" and then says "it was me who gave out Dr Kelly's name", it would be wrong to look at either of those statements in isolation.

We have to look at both the statements together. In other words, in their totality!

Does that make sense? I know this is difficult for the children (and it's pretty difficult for some of us grown-ups as well!).

But that doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to understand these great mysteries which are so important to keeping our faith alive!

In the wonderful words of St. Peter to the Mandelsonians, "There remain these three things, brethren: faith, hope and totality. And the greatest of these is totality". T.B.

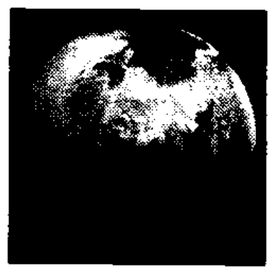
A Message from the Rev. Dubya, of the Church of the Latter-Day Morons

To my brothers and sisters, in Great Britainland, and my good friend Tony Blix and his delightful wife Cherie-Pie. I want you all, my brothers, to journey with me on my crusade into the heavens, where a new axis of evil has been set up on the planet Mars.

This has been known as the "Red Planet" because it has been inhabited by commie terrorists, who plan to take over the entire universe, under the inspiration of their evil leader Osama bin Vader.

Unless we seek out this new Prince of Eviltude lurking in his cave on Mars, like a rattlesnake in his hole, then I can assure you, my friends, it cannot be long before he launches his so-called Weapons of Mars Destruction.

And evidence we have gleaned from a close study of the film *They came From Outer Space* (b/w, 1952, Channel 5, 3.45am, Wed) proves beyond peradventure that Darth Laden is now capable of launching his UFOs within no less than 45 million light years from now!



Join with me in this great mission to find oil on Mars!

God Bless you all,

The Rev. George Skywalker,
Jedi Knight and U.S. Marshall.

Parish Postbag

Dear Sir,

Although we may have had our differences in the past, I would like to put on record that I now consider Mr Gordon Brown to be an outstanding member of the PCC, well capable of taking over from the present

Yours sincerely
Robin Cook,
The Old Organ Loft, The High Street.

The editor regrets that letters from bitter, disloyal, self-seeking adulterers may have to be cut for reasons of space. P.M.

Judgement Day

A lot of people are very worried by what is being called the "Day of Judgement" (next Tuesday). All I can say to them is to quote the old text "The innocent man who has done nothing wrong has nothing to fear. Whereas his friend Geoff Hoon is almost certainly going to get the chop" *(Book of Saving Job 17.3).*

News In Brief

ARABS REFUSE TO APOLOGISE

ARABS have today refused to apologise for comments that Robert Kilroy-Silk has contributed nothing to society at large.

Despite calls for them to apologise, the Arabs have continued to attack Kilroy-Silk, saying but for the vast quantities of oil in his hair, no one would take *(cont. p. 94)*

WILL HE LAST THE YEAR?

FOLLOWING his faltering performance on breakfast television last Sunday, the question is again being asked 'Will he last the year?'

"His health has clearly suffered, he had difficulty with a number of quite simple questions and he clearly no longer has the support of friends and colleagues who see him as a lonely, isolated figure, now sadly out of touch.

"So I really cannot see how David Frost can go on," said the Prime Minister Tony *(cont. p. 94)*

EVERYTHING GIVES YOU CANCER

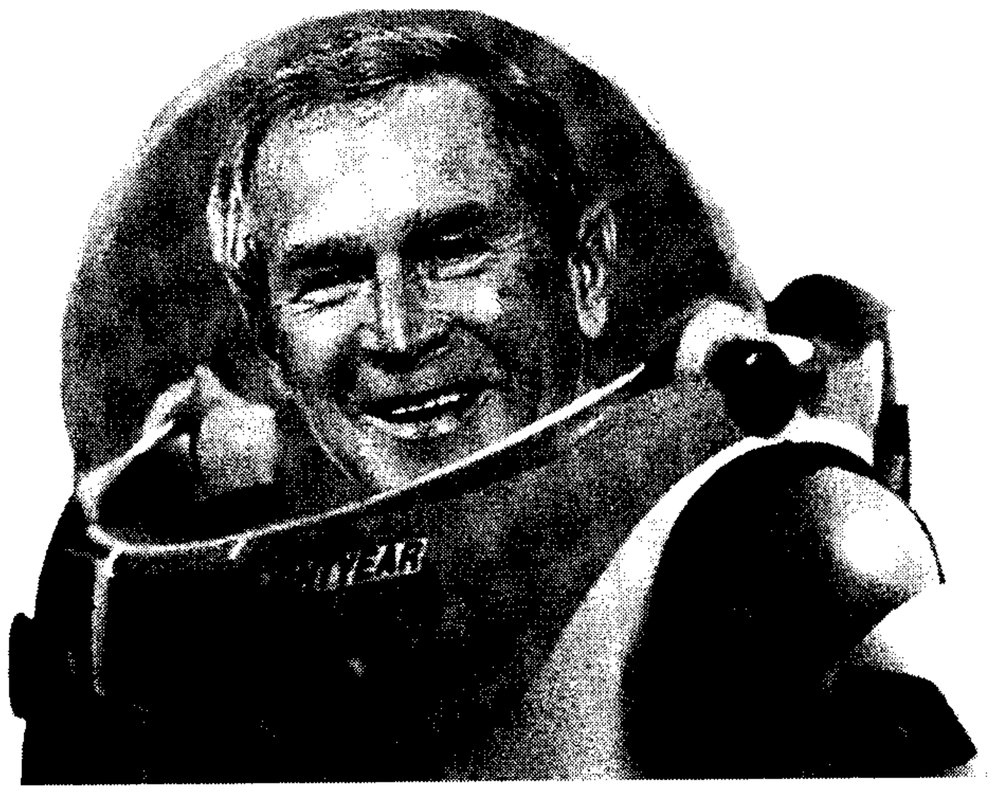
U.S. SCIENTISTS have revealed the results of a shocking study that says that everything gives you cancer.

"We'd always assumed that everything gives you cancer," said the scientist leading the study, "but now we have proof that everything you've ever eaten, inhaled, sprayed upon yourself or even brushed up against gives you cancer.

"Our advice is for people to kill themselves now rather than risk doing anything, since that is almost certain to lead to death and *(cont. p. 94)*

This Year's Must-Have All-Action Toy!

BUSH LIGHTYEAR



SPACE RANGER

The cartoon character who is going to Mars and who thinks he's the President of the United States. Press his buttons and he will say one of his three famous phrases:

"Bush Lightyear to the rescue"

"I come in peace or rather I don't"

"To Infinitude and Beyoncé"

Price: $700 billion

TV Highlights

Boss Swap (C4)

IN THIS week's episode of the role swap show, Gordon, who's in charge of a medium-sized economy, attempts to switch roles with Tony, who's struggling to run a medium-sized country.

EYE RATING: *Z-z-z-z-z-z*

THE MAGIC OF TONY

He is beyond belief
Illusionist and
Escapologist
FOR ALL OCCASIONS

Newbury Weekly News

the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOLEY
Y'KNOW, EVEN THOUGH SEAMAN'S CALLED IT A DAY...
DAVID SEAMAN RETIRES
I STILL FEEL HIS PRESENCE EVERY SATURDAY...
PIGS. HAV' IT

POETRY CORNER

Lines On The Impending Retirement As An MP Of Mr Tam Dalyell Of The Binns

So. Farewell
Then Tam
Dalyell,
Old Etonian,
Father of
The House
And critic
Of Mrs
Thatcher.

"What about
The Belgrano?"
That was your
Catchphrase.

"What about
The Belgrano?"
That was your
Other catchphrase.

You invented
The 'West
Lothian
Question'.

But what was
The question?
And what was
The answer?

Now you are
Retiring we
May never
Know.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

P.S. So Farewell
Then also David
Seaman.

You have
Retired from
Premiership
Football. You
Did not have
A catchphrase.

But then,
As Keith says,
In recent times,
'Catching' was not
Exactly your
Thing.

E.J.T.

What You Will See If The Barclay Brothers Take Over And Let Andrew Neil Run The Paper

The Daily Brillograph

Friday, January 23, 2004

'Older Men Are More Sexy' – Official

Brillo: Come back to my pad

BY W.F. DEEDES

A SURVEY carried out by the Daily Brillograph has good news for Britain's middle-aged men.

Figures show that young, beautiful women much prefer the company of gentlemen in their fifties and above.

Said one twenty-something, oriental interviewee, "My ideal lover is about fifty-five, with a Scottish accent and a distinguished record in the media industry. He should wear a vest, a baseball cap and have hair like an old-fashioned pan scourer. Blokes like that are just yummy!"

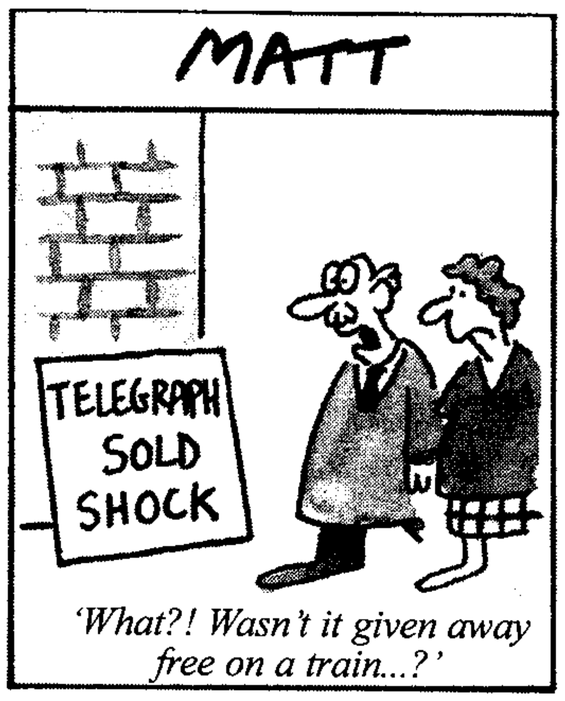
Poll details in full **2, 3, 4**

Brillograph City News

Q: ***Who are they, the mystery brothers who now own the Brillograph?***

A: ***None of your business***

Gilbert and George Barclay, the shy duo



'What?! Wasn't it given away free on a train...?'

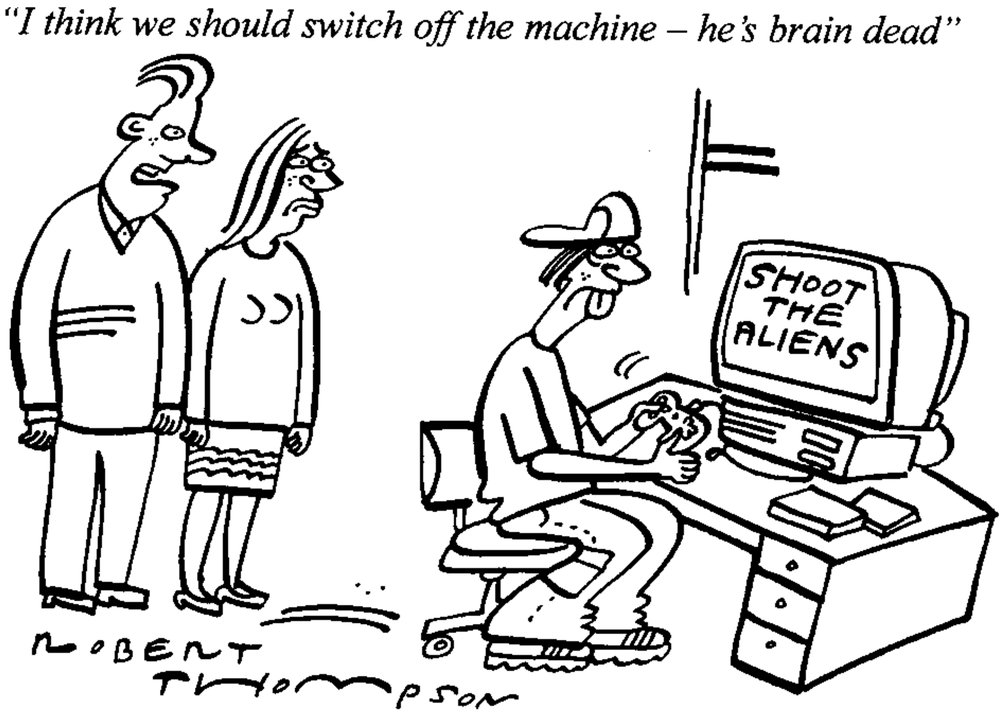
On Other Pages

Obituary – Lord Black of Crossword **12**

Will 'Wacko' Blacko survive his trial or did 'Blacko' really 'interfere' with the bottom line? **6**

Will Conrad Blackadder be voted Britain's funniest sitcom? **94** (*That's enough Black. Ed.)*

"I think we should switch off the machine – he's brain dead"



Nursery Times

Friday, 23 January, 2004

NEW OWNERS FOR NURSERY TELEGRAPH

by Our Media Staff **Raymond Noddy**

THE TWEEDLE twins, Dum and Dee, have acquired the ownership of the Nursery Telegraph, it was announced last night.

Little is known of the two brothers who cultivate an air of mystery about themselves and live in a remote castle on the island of Brilleau (population 3).

One of the few people ever to interview the twins is Alice (16) who sold her memoirs for a record sum.

She told us, "I bumped into them in Wonderland and couldn't get a word of sense out of them. They seemed to talk in riddles. It was all nonsense, which suggests that they would be ideal people to run the Nursery Telegraph".

On Other Pages

● **Cow To Jump Over Mars** – New promise

● **Did Prince Charming Kill Snow White?** Inquest opens

● **Little Red Riding Hood Shows New Lingerie Range**

THE FATKINS DIET A Correction

IN RECENT WEEKS, we may have inadvertently given our readers the impression that the Fatkins Diet, which involves eating huge amounts of fried bacon, eggs, sausages and steak, was the basis of a healthy regime that would encourage weight loss.

This was due to a typographical error in which the words "huge amounts of fried bacon, egg, sausage and steak" mistakenly appeared in place of the words "fresh fruit, green vegetables and plenty of exercise".

We apologise to all those readers who have died of coronary disease as a result of following the Fatkins diet.

RUSEDSKI NEW TEST SHOCK

by Our Drug Staff **Phil Syringe**

TOP English tennis player Greg Rusedski's career looked in the balance last night after a urine test proved positive for traces of Maple Syrup.

"This demonstrates beyond a shadow of a doubt that Rusedski is guilty of being Canadian," said a relieved English tennis official.

"Anyone caught taking Maple Syrup is clearly not English at all and it just goes to show how marvellous Tim Henman is."

Land of Dope and Glory

Tim Henman has been tested in the past, admitted ATP officials, but his specimen only contained "Pimms, cucumber sandwiches and strawberries and cream."

What You Won't See

THE TOAD DIARIES

as dramatised for BBC94

(Shot of large agreeable castle Toad Hall, with notice reading "Weasels, Stoats And Wogs Keep Out!". Flashy open-topped sports car screams to halt on gravel as servants run for cover. Alan Toad MP [for it is he] takes off goggles and jumps out of car)

Voiceover *(reading from Toad Diaries)*: July 3 1987. In high spirits, after driving back from terrific lunch with Ratty at my club. We discussed what a shit Badger is. Got squiffy on three bottles of Kenneth Grahame's '61 port.

(We see Toad being welcomed at the door of Toad Hall by his loving rottweilers)

Toad: Hullo Hitler. Hullo Goebbels. Hullo Bruce Anderson. That darkie postman's coming up the drive. Go get him!

(Amusing shot of postman throwing letters in the air as he is pursued by slavering hounds)

Toad Voiceover: Went round to Daphne Dormouse's flat in Belgravia.

(Shot of Toad entering agreeable room, taking off trousers as he does so)

Toad: You're a cracking piece of tottie, Daffers, aren't you, and no mistake!

Daphne Dormouse: Oo, you are a one, Toady!

Toad: What time does your father, Judge Dormouse, get back home from Court?

Daphne: Don't worry, Toady, we've got at least an hour.

(Enter Judge's wife Lady Dormouse and a succession of his other daughters)

Toad: I say, the more the merrier! Poop, poop!

(Cut to scene in the Riverbank Club, Pall Mall, with chairs full of senile moles, rats, badgers and Sir Peregrine Worsthorne)

Badger: Toad, I have to tell you, you're getting a bit of a reputation, if you know what I mean. You've got to stop gallivanting about and cut down on the drinking. Your father, Lord Toad of Civilisation, would be ashamed of you!

(Portuguese waiter arrives with huge brandy for Toad)

Toad: Thanks, dago chummie!

Badger: And you'll have to stop flogging muskets to those Iraqi stoats. It's against the law, you know. Take a leaf out of young Mole's book. He's a coming man and knows when to lie low.

Toad: That's because he's a bloody mole, you prig! I hate black-nosers like mole!

Voiceover: After seeing Badger, I realised that I'd blown it! What a fool I am! What a miserable toad I am. I will never be made Deputy Under-Secretary for Picnics and Road Safety unless I learn how to keep my trap shut. Must give up drink and women.

(Cut to shot of drunken Toad with blonde companion, Miss Daisy Rabbit, by his side, careering down country lane at 80 mph and over-turning car in ditch)

Toad: That's blown it! It'll all be in the News of The Wildwood tomorrow.

Next Week: Toad comes up before Mr Justice Dormouse on assorted traffic offences, including arms-dealing and adultery.

CAST IN FULL

MR TOAD ..... LESLIE PHILLIPS
BADGER ..... WILLIAM WHITELAW
DAPHNE DORMOUSE ..... EMILIA FOX
DAISY RABBIT ..... AMANDA HOLDEN
RATTY ..... JOHN MAJOR
MOLE .....MICHAEL PORTILLO
OLD WASHERWOMAN ..... MRS THATCHER
FIRST WEASEL ..... SIR DAVID FROST

THE TIMES JANUARY 23 2004

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sir, I hold no brief for Mr Kilroy-Silk, but he is quite wrong in claiming that the Arabs have made no contribution to civilisation. One has only to think of the great 8th Century astronomer Ibn Al Koren (765-883), who not only invented the bicycle, the coffee grinder and the electric toaster, but also came up with the theory of relativity a full 1600 years before Einstein.

Yours faithfully,
REV. SIMON FLOWERDEW,
The Old Cottage, Cleethorpes.

Sir, I have never watched Mr Kilroy-Silk's performances on television, nor have I ever read the Sunday Express. However, may I point out that, while we Europeans were languishing in the Dark Ages, the Arabs were inventing football, potato crisps and television, a fact ignored by Mr Kilroy-Soap in his ill-informed rant in the Spectator.

Yours sincerely,
ARTHUR STOVEPIPE (Sir),
(former Ambassador to the Sultanate of Oman), Dorset.

Sir, Whilst I hold no brief for the Arabs, it must be admitted that they are a bunch of murderous towel-heads who, given the chance, would blow us all to smithereens in a couple of sheikhs!

MIKE GIGGLER,
Via email.

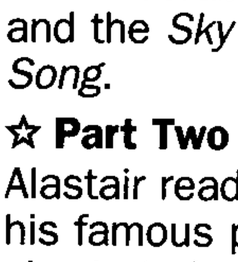
Sir, Whilst I absolutely deplore the odious and racist sentiments expressed by Mr Killjoy-Slick and wholly support the BBC's decision to suspend him, surely in a democracy we should all have the right to express our views freely, especially if the speaker believes that all Arabs are homicidal terrorists who are clearly strangers to the benefits of a deodorant.

Yours sincerely,
COLONEL TWISTON DAVIES,
The Old Telegraph, Canary Wharf.

"Oh, all right then..."

Coming soon to a theatre near you...

An Evening With ALASTAIR CAMPBELL



Meet Doctor Spin in person, as he "tells it like it was" during his turbulent years as the Prime Minister's right-hand man!!!

★★★★ PROGRAMME IN FULL ★★★★

☆ Part One
The famous *Dodgy Dossier Monologue* (approx. 2 hours)

First Interlude
Alastair plays a selection on the bagpipes, including *Blair On A G String, Mandy Where's Your Troosers?, The Miserable Gordons* and the *Sky Television Song*.

☆ Part Two
Alastair reads highlights of his famous pornographic short stories for the magazine *Forum*.

Second Interlude
Alastair runs around the auditorium in a recreation of his immortal London Marathon run of 2003.

☆ Part Three
Questions From The Audience – This gives the public the chance to ask the great man any question they wish.

Sample

Q: When you said it would take only 45 minutes...?

A: F*** off, scum!

Q: Is it true that you were once Robert Maxwell's best friend?

A: F*** off, scum!

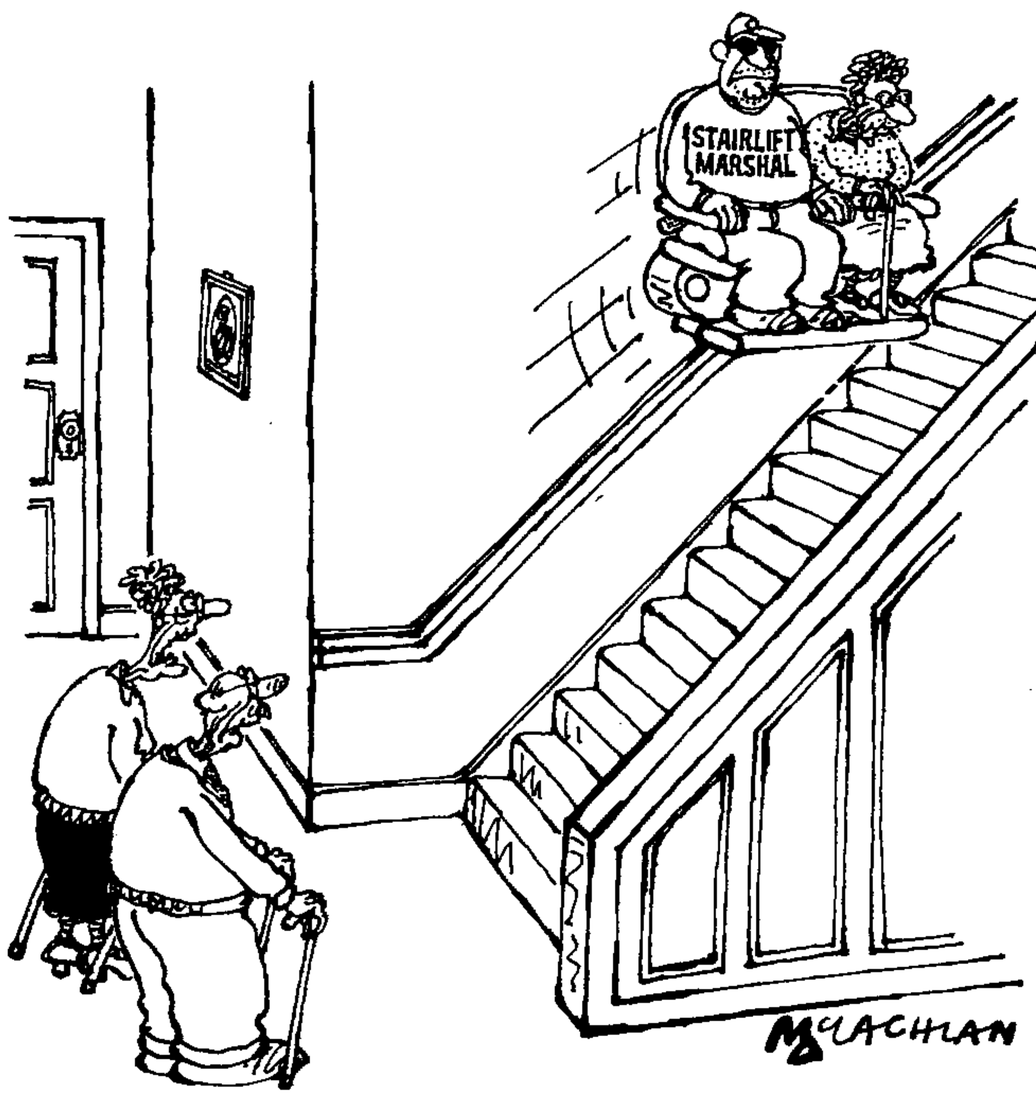
Q: Which is your favourite Spice Girl?

A: F*** off, scum!

☆ Finale
Alastair starts drinking heavily and has nervous breakdown on stage.

Catch Comical Ali C. at the following prestigious venues:
● The Conway Rooms, Sutton Coldfield ● The Samson and Delilah Ballroom, Hull ● The Sir Alan Bates Theatre, Frinton-on-Sea ● The Pentagon, Neasden

"You will laugh, you will cry, you will ask for your money back!!"



"Well, I think the security in this old people's home is going much too far"

NEW DIANA DEATH THEORY

by Our Royal Staff **James Jenny Bond**

AN INCREDIBLE new explanation for the death of the late Princess Diana has been offered to the British public in the last few days.

The extraordinary theory claims that the Princess was not, as everyone thought, murdered by the Duke of Edinburgh and MI6, but was instead killed in a car crash because the driver was drunk.

The theory goes even further with wild allegations that there was no big flash in the tunnel, no switching of blood samples and no secret service agents tampering with the car brakes.

However, a number of Dianologists were quick to pour scorn on the new non-conspiracy theory, "This is clearly the work of internet lunatics," said one, "who seek to find an absurd story to account for events which have a perfectly rational explanation – i.e. space aliens in league with the Duke of Kent and Dotty the Bull Terrier flew through a time-hole causing a *(cont. p. 94)*

The Daily Tudorgraph
Friday, January 23, 2004

HENRY V TO RESIGN FROM ARMY

by Our Defence Staff W.M. Deedes

THE HERO of Agincourt, King Henry V, has announced that he is going to quit the army and has admitted feeling "disillusioned" following the stunning victory over the French.

Falstaff Officer

Henry V is famous for his rousing speech on the eve of battle which won many admirers around the world and was even compared with speeches by the legendary British commander Colonel Tim Collins.

But now Henry is to turn his back on a military career that has seen him capture Harfleur,

defeat the evil Dauphin and earn the fealty of the Dukes of Burgundy and Orleans.

Pistol Whipped

"Henry is fed up with army life," said his wife Katherine. "He was accused of war crimes, subjected to a questioning of his integrity and rubbished in the media by Shakespeare."

She added, "Henry couldn't stand the bureaucracy and the political correctness any longer. All that paperwork about the Salic Law drove him barmy."

Once More Unto The Breach Of The Health & Safety Act

Henry is also believed to have been furious about the equipment used on the battlefield. Friends say that there was a shortage of cavalry which led to an over-dependence on the ground-to-air longbows and some Welsh soldiers only had leeks with which to "beat about your pate upon St David's Day" and *(cont. Act V, Scene 94)*

Daily Mail
FRIDAY, JANUARY 23, 2004

DID FALL IN HOUSE PRICES CAUSE DIANA'S DEATH?

by Our Entire Staff

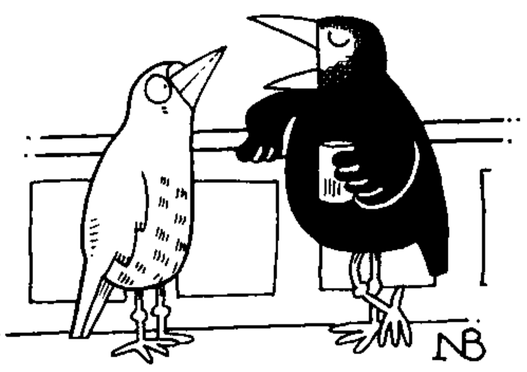
SENSATIONAL new evidence from the Scotland Yard Inquiry into the death of Diana, Princess of Wales shows that there may have been a link between the 2% fall in house prices in 1997 and the fatal crash which *(cont. p. 94)*

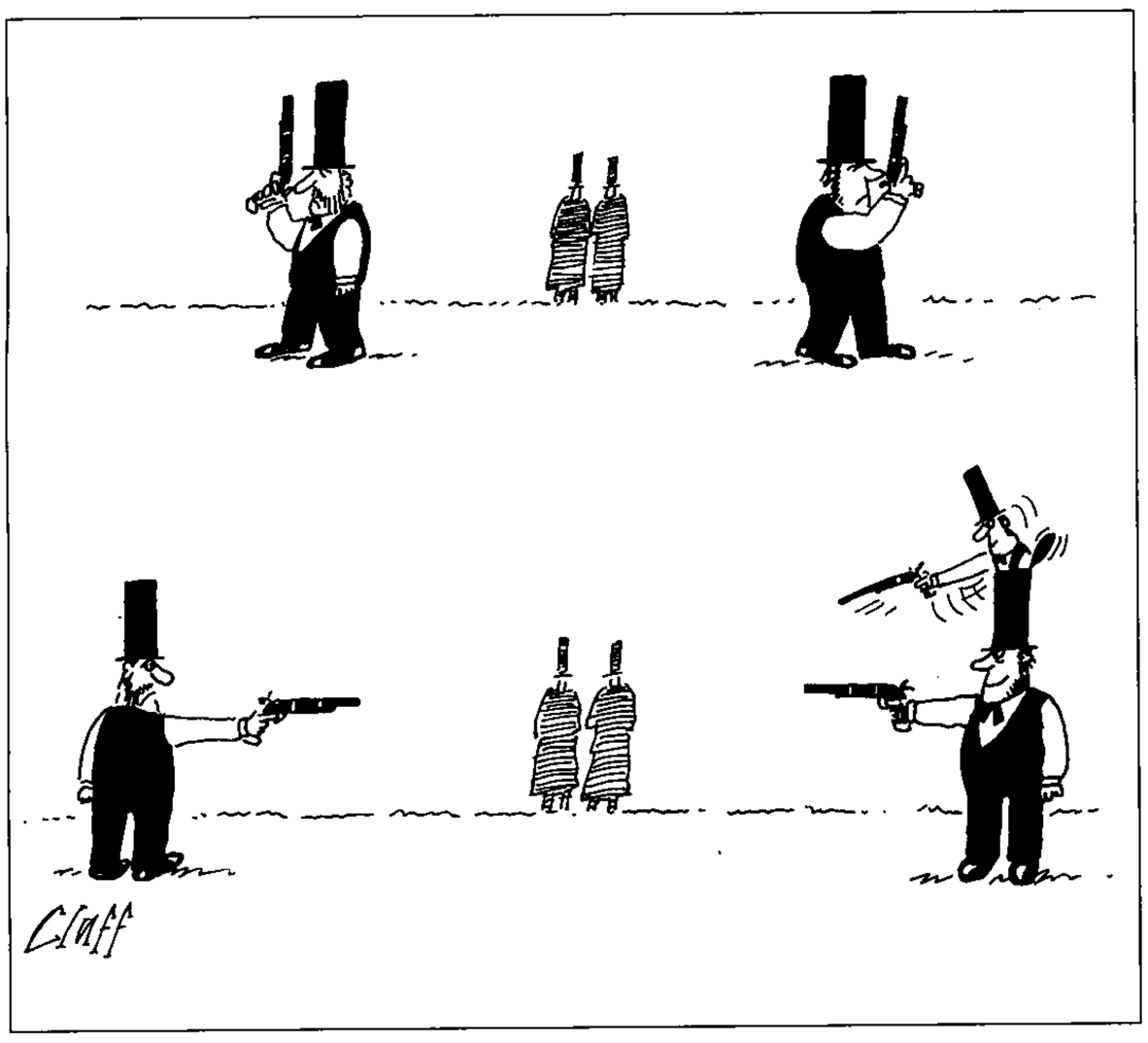
ON OTHER PAGES

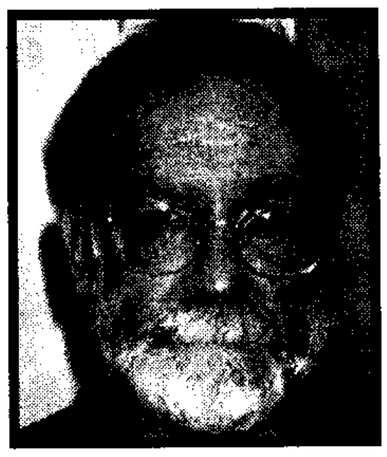
■ **Was Shipman Murdered By The Duke Of Edinburgh?**
asks Mohamed Fayed

NURSERY CONSPIRACY RHYME

Who killed Cock Robin?
"Dunno," said the crow,
"But I heard from the linnet
That Prince Charles, MI6 and
the Duke of Edinburgh
are all involved in it"







SHIPMAN SPECIAL

as heard on all channels

Presenter: Your mother was killed by Dr Shipman. How did you feel when you heard the news of his suicide?

Interviewee: Well... I... er...

Presenter: Did you feel angry that he'd cheated justice...

Interviewee: ...er...

Presenter: ...or did you feel traumatised as all the memories of that awful time came back to you?

Interviewee: ...er... I...

Presenter: Did you feel like crying? Perhaps you'd like to cry now? After all, your mother was murdered in cold blood by this monster. Isn't that worth a few tears?

Interviewee: Well, it's just that...

Presenter: It would really help if you could cry now. 'I's and 'Er's are no good to me. There are a lot of people out there who are waiting for you to break down. I mean, this man killed your mother, your closest relative. What does it take to wring a few tears out of you? What is wrong with you? *(Continued for several hours on all media)*

A Cab Driver Writes

Every week a well-known taxi driver is invited to comment on an issue of topical importance.

THIS WEEK: **Dave Blunkett** (Cab No. 14325) on the suicide of Dr Harold Shipman.

Crack open the bubbly, eh, guv! What a bastard! Cheating justice, that's what I call it. How dare he top himself like that instead of doing his full time? What did he get for killing all those old ladies up in wherever it was? 258 years? Not long, if you ask me! And what a bloody waste of money that would have been, keeping him inside for all those years. Do you know what should have happened to him? He should have been strung up! It's the only way to deal with people like him. And there's a question I want answered, guv! What were all those warders doing? I mean, it was obvious he was going to bump himself off! Tell you what, there should be a full top-level inquiry. Still, what a waste of money that would be.

Why does everyone keep going on about it, anyway? He's dead, innee? And that's a result! Bastard!

Blimey! I've just driven into something, guv. Aargh!

Next week: Mel Phillips (Cab No. 73842) on "The Myth Of Global Warming".

THE Sun SAYS

BRITAIN once again leads the world!

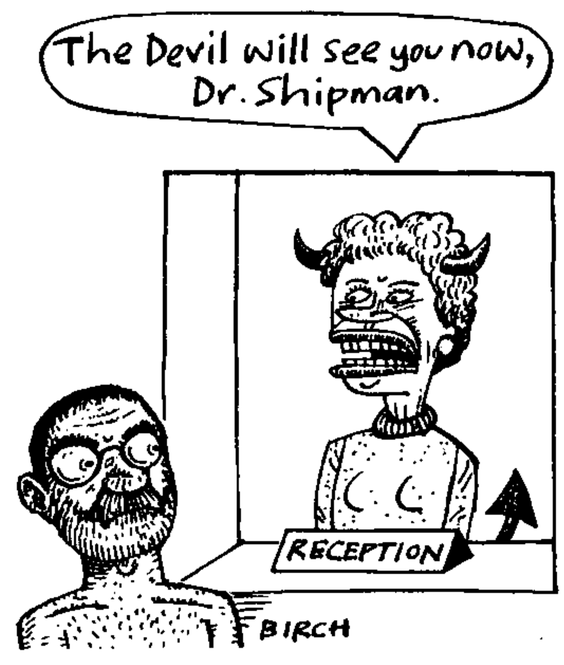
We may no longer be able to produce a Wimbledon champion or a winning football team.

But, make no mistake, this country has at last produced a global superstar who has no equal!

Forget the German Cannibal! Forget the Washington Sniper! Forget even that Russian looney with the beard whose name we can't remember.

When it comes to serial killing, it's still a British lad who takes the gold!

Whatever his faults (and the Sun has been the first to say he wasn't perfect), Hyde GP, Harold Shipman, has put Britain at the top of the world!



DIARY

TONY PARSONS

Make no bones about it.

Saddam Hussein is a thoroughly nasty piece of work.

A mass-murderer. A slimebag.

And a foreigner to boot.

Not the kind of bloke I'd ever want to share a natter with over a pint and a packet of Cheesy Footballs down The Old Red Lion.

Come to think of it, whatever happened to Cheesy Footballs?

And whatever happened to The Old Red Lion?

Gone, but not forgotten.

Just like Saddam. And you know what?

Saddam deserves what's coming to him.

With brass knobs and thumbscrews on.

You know what folk down my street are all asking?

I'll tell you.

They're asking this – how does Saddam compare with our own right royal figurehead, the late Queen Mum?

To me, there's no comparison.

Don't kid yourself, Saddam.

You never took the trouble to visit the bombed-out East End during historic World War II.

You never kept us smiling through the toughest times, radiant and well-turned-out, a symbol of all that was once Great about Britain.

Yes. It's official.

The British people loved the warm-hearted Queen Mum.

And they don't give a fig for a tosser like Saddam.

But fair's fair. I admire the Queen Mum, but make no mistake.

Given the choice, it's Rod Stewart's lovely lady the gorgeous Penny Lancaster we'd all give a good seeing-to.

The girl's got everything.

Great legs. Terrific tits. A bubbly personality. Get-up-and-go. The lot.

Which makes me wonder.

If Tony Blair really wants to show the world what we Brits are capable of, why can't he hitch up with someone more like Penny Lancaster?

Take it from me. Penny would look a million dollars leaping up those White House steps to greet President George W. Bush in a thong.

Instead, what does Blair do?

The guy skulks around with a middle-aged mother-of-four who wastes her spare time yacking in court, if you can believe it, and couldn't lap-dance to save her life.

Okay, so Penny's spoken for. Rod's not likely to give her up without a fight, and who can blame him?

But Jordan's still single. And she's one hot babe. Any red-blooded bloke would be proud to have her on his arm.

And not only on his arm, mate.

So prove you're a man, Tony.

Present Cherie with her marching orders. Tell her to take the sprogs with her.

Install Jordan in Downing Street by Spring.

And you'll have earned my vote, anyday.

I've just been reading the new novel by Gabriel Garcia Marquez.

And it's blown my mind.

It makes that tired old slapper Victoria Beckham look like a total has-been.

Gabriel Garcia can do everything. Words. Sentences. Paragraphs.

Even whole chapters.

And what can Victoria Beckham do?

In a word: Sod All.

Can she sing? No.

Can she dance? No.

Can she fill up space? No.

Or at least not much.

But I won't hear a word against her husband, footballer David.

Now, there's a bloke who's handy with a football.

It's high time the toffee-nosed high-ups in the Football Association made him Captain of England.

And then it'll be, Arise, Sir Beckham!

But not you, Mrs B – you can bloody well stay kneeling.

And – you know what – why not scrub the floor while you're about it?

Believe me, I don't hold a candle for so-called Doctor Harold Shipman.

Doctor? Doctor???

Pull the other!

Serial killer, more like. And all-round nasty piece of work.

Ask yourself this. What sort of a doctor cold-bloodedly murders his patients?

Not any sort of doctor I know.

Doctors are meant to heal people. Not make them worse.

And one thing's for sure.

Once you're dead, no amount of pills will make you better.

In the old days, doctors made you well again. They didn't go around killing you.

Or not unless they had to, for medical reasons.

But these days, the whole medical profession's up the spout.

What kind of world are we living in?

You get a bit of a sniffle, call the doctor. And the next thing you know he's pulled up your sleeve and he's administering a fatal injection to you.

And what about his missus, Primrose Shipman?

Blimey. There's a woman who's let herself go.

Like so many modern women – Ginger Spice is another – she should make more of an effort. Take a bit of exercise. Cut down on the carbohydrates.

Then – and only then – can she start looking for another bloke.

Okay, she's no good around the house. The Shipman home was in a terrible state. If you gave her a scrubbing brush, she'd probably eat it with ketchup.

But some blokes prefer the slatternly type. The type who sit on their fat arses all day, leaving all their muck exactly as they found it.

Brave farmer Tony Martin, for one.

What's more, the bloke's a bachelor.

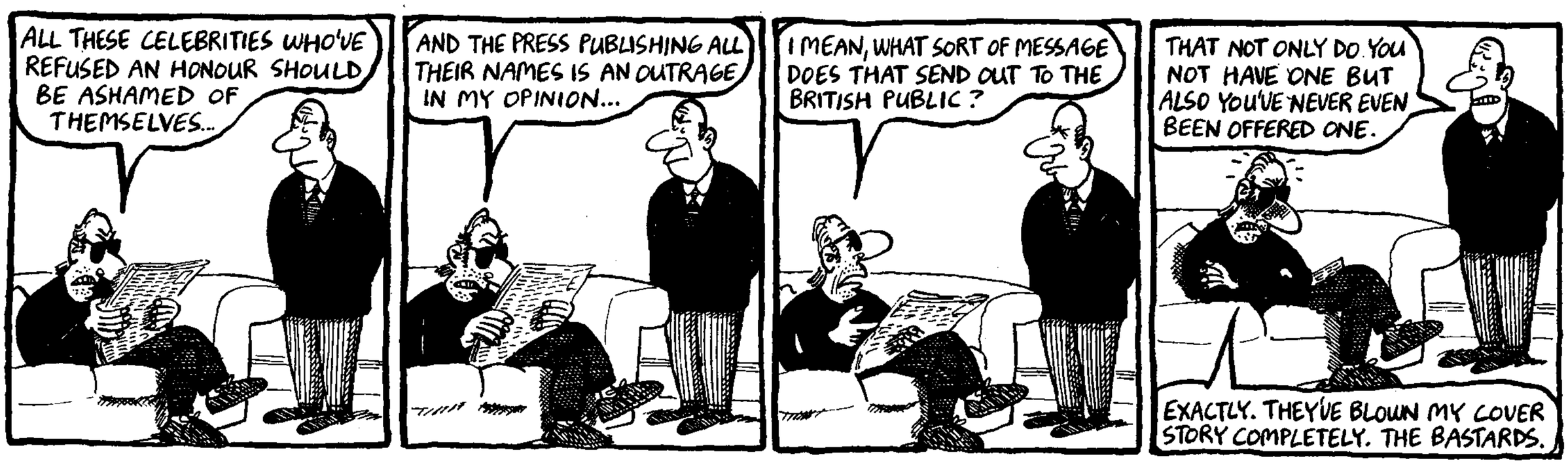
After all this time, he must be gagging for it.

Are you thinking what I'm thinking, Primrose?

Go for it, love. You might never get a better chance.

As told to

CRAIG BROWN


ALL THESE CELEBRITIES WHO'VE REFUSED AN HONOUR SHOULD BE ASHAMED OF THEMSELVES...
AND THE PRESS PUBLISHING ALL THEIR NAMES IS AN OUTRAGE IN MY OPINION...
I MEAN, WHAT SORT OF MESSAGE DOES THAT SEND OUT TO THE BRITISH PUBLIC?
THAT NOT ONLY DO YOU NOT HAVE ONE BUT ALSO YOU'VE NEVER EVEN BEEN OFFERED ONE.
EXACTLY. THEY'VE BLOWN MY COVER STORY COMPLETELY. THE BASTARDS.

Literary Review

High Con-cept

The Time Traveller's Wife
Audrey Niffenegger
(Cape, £12.99)
The Fortress of Solitude
Jonathan Lethem
(Faber, £12.99)

WHEN Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* caused such a fuss a couple of seasons back, everyone rushed to say that this was a new dawn for American fiction. Post-modernism and trickery were dead: what we'd get was long, socially realistic family sagas in the Franzen style.

As it turned out, this foresight of American Forsytes proved spectacularly wrong. The big US hits of last year were Manhattan magical realism, full of games: Alice Sebold's *The Lovely Bones*, narrated from heaven by a dead girl; and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated*, a story of the Holocaust told jokily through the device of an incompetent Latvian translator who had learned what English he knew from a thesaurus.

And so the holy grail for American editors now is the concept novel: the book which takes a popular genre – love story, crime yarn – and gives it a non-realistic twist. Two of them – 500-page whoppers turning on a cute conceit – have just reached England.

In Audrey Niffenegger's *The Time Traveller's Wife*, a fairly standard marital romance between Clare and Henry is transformed by a Philip K Dick-ish conceit. Henry suffers from the invented science-fiction disease of Chrono-Displacement Disorder, a fault in his genes which causes him suddenly to slip out of time, re-emerging naked and without identification at different moments in time.

Niffenegger's trick is that most writers would have – and have – used this device to send their hero back to the crusades or the beaches of Normandy. This book, though, like one of those Rover tickets which restricts the passenger to certain bus or train zones, limits Henry to movement within a plausible life-span: the periods to which he travels stretch from 1968 to 2053.

Claire, meanwhile, is ageing at a normal rate from birth in 1971 to old-age in the middle of the 21st century, but endures long absences while her husband is elsewhere and the knowledge that he could reappear at any age: when she's six, he's 32, but when she's 82, he's 43.

This is all very clever – and brings in lots of resonances of age-gap romance, infidelity and even paedophilia – but finally suffers the problems of most fantasy and sci-fi writing: that altering the laws of physics means never having to say you're sorry. Because Niffenegger is making up the rules as she goes along, there's no tension. It could, though, be a hell of a movie, where the visual dislocations will thrill in a way that can merely seem confusing on the page.

The sense of a concept twist being used to rescue a narrative from drabness is even stronger in *The Fortress Of Solitude*. The first half of Jonathan Lethem's long novel feels like American Hornby: a white and a black music fan with the (nudge bloody nudge) names of Dylan and Mingus obsess over the culture of the 1970s. Fans of superhero comics (the title comes from Superman), they later find a mysterious ring which gives them supernatural powers. Again, you feel that an author is using the spice of anti-realism to save a pretty tasteless pie.

But the success of Niffenegger and Lethem means that every student in a writing school will now be planning concept novels: a murderer narrating a detective story from hell, a New York housewife discovering that her Puritan grandparents are able to nip through time to meet her in Starbucks and take her back to the Mayflower.

Lethem's and Niffenegger's books, however, suggest that the "concept novel" may come to be spoken of in the horrified tones used in music for the 1970s "concept album".

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS Pt 94

A People's History of Britain
Rebecca Fraser
(Chatto & Windus £25)

from the preface...

How well I remember, as a young girl, sitting at tea in the nursery at Campden Hill Square and being read to, by our governess Miss Chasm, from that most estimable volume, Mrs Bute Prendergast's *Precious Albion: a genteel and patriotic history* (1894), a work forged in an age when our Imperial responsibilities were a source of satisfaction rather than disquiet. Needless to relate, time's winged chariot has swept on since this dauntless lady first appraised her quill. Clio, the muse of history, has gathered up her skirts and skipped away. A swimming pool, to a former generation, may seem only a sink to its less heroic successor.

And yet it seemed to me, embarking on this book with my three young daughters, Tantarella, Hexagon and Ariadne, in mind, that some easy framework were required to guide members of the general public through the shooting gallery of contending arquebuses that is the historian's disputed fact. Furthermore, it appeared to me, that our debt to certain gifted individuals in our nation's past was such that it behoves us to celebrate their achievements in no very niggardly manner. Sir Winston Churchill, for example, was a great statesman who contributed in a by no means unremarkable fashion to our military dispositions at a time of considerable international strife. Others there are that go unsung, such as Mrs Stultitia Blodwyn, originator of that both elegant and necessary feminine garment, the crinoline. Yet all have their undoubted place in a rich and picturesque tapestry, vivid in its outlines, savage in its extremities, pitiless in its judgements. Doughty knights on their arm-girt steeds, noble ladies on their brocade-bridled palfreys, churl and chamberlain, serf and seneschal – all march side by side in this unforgettable panoply... [*continues*]

from Chapter One: "Roman"...

Everywhere in this storm-tossed island, shorn of its last defenders, muscular, hairy-breeched barbarians came ravening upon the sorry British and put them to the sword. All were horribly murdered, often with considerable barbarity. A ravened upon and despairing people, these Romano-British perhaps exemplified the spirit that we associate with their more lusty descendants: quiet yet unyielding hope. But it was not to be... Hastings... Agincourt... "My Kingdom for a Horse"... Good Queen Bess... Noll Cromwell..."We are not amused"... *continues*]

What the press said:

"An astonishing triumph" — Andrew Roberts.

"A tour de force" — Sir Max Hastings.

"I know her mother" — Paul Johnson.

Gone With The Wind

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ BOOK-LOVERS are losing yet more ground to computers and entertainment in Britain's public libraries.

First, Liverpool decided to spend £35m converting its historic Central Library into a "World Discovery Centre" by gutting five floors of books and desks and replacing them with a gallery, café and computers (*Eye* 1096).

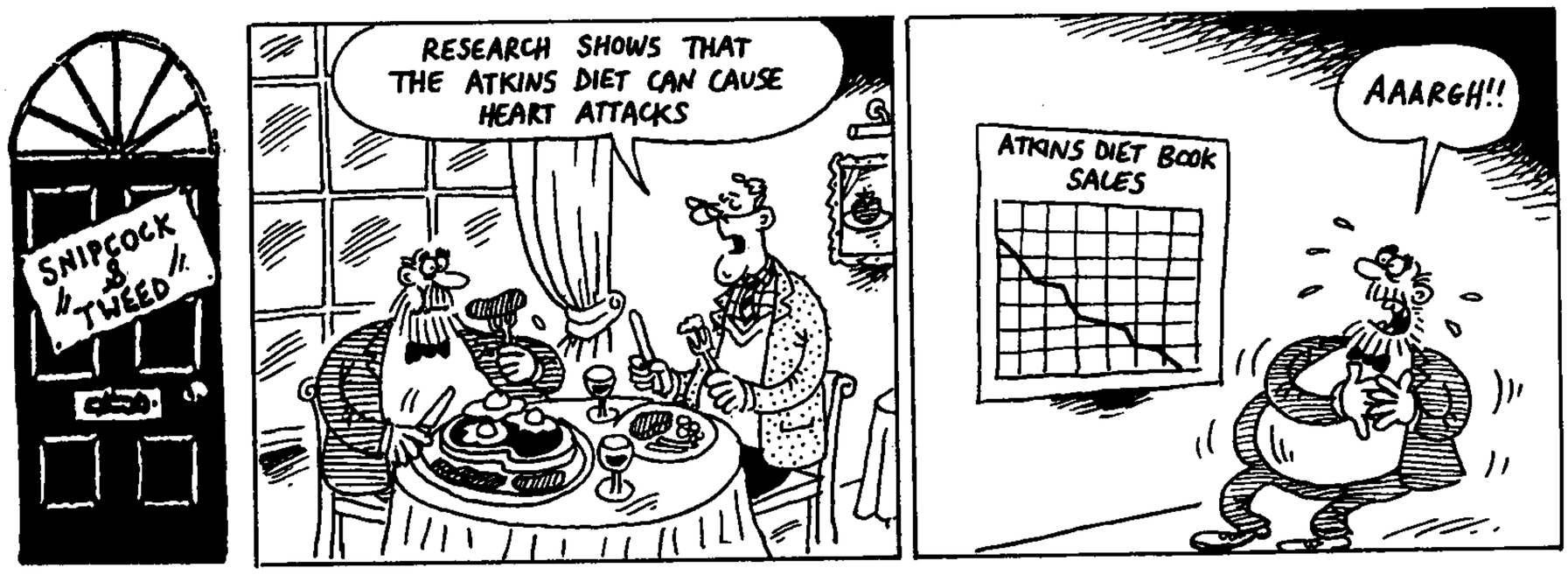
Now Staffordshire county council has launched an advert for a new deputy head of library services, featuring a cardigan-wearing and bespectacled librarian, with finger on lips. "Sorry Edna," reads the ad. "Libraries aren't the sombre, silent places you'd like them to be. Not in Staffordshire. Our libraries are welcoming places where the whole community can access vital information or life-affirming entertainment."

Anyone wanting to quietly read a book – whether for knowledge or entertainment – clearly isn't welcome. Nor are experienced and qualified librarians like "Edna", apparently, as library experience isn't necessary for the job.

'Bookworm'

Warballs

"Influenced by the events following 11 September, which reaffirmed the special relationship existing between the USA and Britain, and the recent Fight of the Century between Lennox Lewis and Mike Tyson, boxing historian Ronnie Wharton has compiled *Ring Wars: Britain Versus America*." — Blurb from Parrs Wood Press.



IN THE BACK

LOCKERBIE: THE ONE-MAN CONSPIRACY

IN public statements before Christmas both prime minister Tony Blair and foreign secretary Jack Straw warmly congratulated themselves on an agreement with the government of Libya in which Colonel Gadaffi renounced weapons of mass destruction he never had.

This self-congratulation continued in a Commons speech by Straw on 6 January. The speech was slightly marred by the continuing riddle of the Lockerbie disaster, the biggest mass murder in British criminal history, for some victims of which the Libyan government has now paid enormous compensation.

Again and again, publicly and privately, Straw assured MPs he would not forget the Lockerbie disaster and that he would be putting some outstanding questions about Lockerbie to the Libyan foreign minister, Abdulrahman Shalgam, when he comes to London later this month. Chief among the unexplained mysteries is the role of the former Libyan government official Abdul Ali Basset Al Megrahi (right), who was convicted in January 2001, after the most expensive trial in British criminal history, of putting a bomb on the Pan Am airliner which exploded over Lockerbie. MPs asked if Megrahi was acting alone in this mass murder, or was he acting as a government official, thus involving Gadaffi and Co in the atrocity.

If Straw asks this question, he is likely to get a rather convoluted reply. For Libyan government ministers do not accept that Megrahi had anything to do with the bombing. They have agreed to pay compensation to the Lockerbie victims chiefly because they want to end sanctions imposed on Libya by the UN and the US. The more the question gets asked, moreover, the more the awful truth begins to emerge: that the conviction and continued imprisonment of Megrahi represents the last and greatest in a long line of British miscarriages of criminal injustice, and that the real responsibility for the Lockerbie bombing lies a long way from Libya.

This grim conclusion emerges clearly from submissions made by Megrahi's Glasgow lawyers to the Scottish criminal cases review commission, which has appointed an investigator to look into his case. These submissions include the awkward fact that two days after the bombing, £11m was paid by agents of the Iranian government to the PFLP–GC – a terrorist group which, British and US intelligence chiefs once believed, was commissioned by Iran to avenge the shooting down by US forces of an Iranian airliner a few months before Lockerbie, killing almost exactly the same number of people.

Positive proof of this payment is included in the submissions. So are intercepts of CIA messages after the bombing that identify the PFLP-GC as the bombers. So is much more information about the evidence of Tony Gauci, the Maltese shopkeeper who alleged at the trial that Megrahi had visited his shop and bought clothes later found in the same suitcase as the bomb. This evidence, weak enough at the trial, is made even weaker by the new evidence: notably the special treatment and fishing trips laid on for Gauci by the Scottish police.

Anyone who still believes in Megrahi's guilt (or can't believe that five senior Scottish judges were unanimously responsible for such a hideous injustice) should get hold of the Scottish magazine *The Drouth* for autumn last year and read *The Lockerbie Scandal* by Edinburgh law professor Robert Black. (Not to mention the *Eye*'s own appraisal after the verdict, *Lockerbie The Flight from Justice* – a few copies still available).

Colin Boyd, the Scottish lord advocate, the lawyer perhaps most responsible for the Lockerbie flight from justice, is appealing against the sentence of the five judges who originally convicted Megrahi and then blandly extended his 20-year prison sentence to 27 years. Boyd thinks the sentence is still too lenient and insists it should be longer.

Though Boyd won the applause of some American families bereaved at Lockerbie, the approach of many British families has been rather different. Pamela Dix, whose brother died at Lockerbie, wrote to the appeal court on 19 November asking the judges not to extend Megrahi's sentence. "I also have concerns," she wrote, "about the certainty that the right man is in prison. Having sat through as much of the evidence as I could at the remote site in London, the circumstantial evidence presented unfortunately left considerable room for doubt. Further, even if Megrahi is guilty of conspiracy to murder, his co-conspirators – who must necessarily share a great deal of responsibility for the bombing – have not been found. The fact that he does not bear sole responsibility is significant to me."

Many other British bereaved relatives share this view. They are a little irritated by Jack Straw's weasel words that he will not forget the Lockerbie disaster, while he persists in refusing the families' demand for a proper inquiry to find out why and how the disaster happened.

HOWARD'S WAY (UP)

AFTER waiting the obligatory 10 minutes – well, three months anyway – before taking a job in the private sector, "new" Labour's former top financial regulator Sir Howard Davies (left) has joined the board of American investment bank Morgan Stanley.

Phil Purcell, chairman and chief executive of the bank, welcomed the former boss of Britain's financial services authority (FSA) warmly. "His public policy DNA will add an important new dimension to Morgan Stanley governance," he drooled, adding that in Sir Howard's time at the FSA "the regulator came to define global best practices in financial services oversight". Tactfully Mr Purcell did not mention that among the chief beneficiaries of Sir Howard's definition of best practice were… the investment banks.

Mr Purcell and his bank have not always been so friendly to their regulator. In April last year the big US investment banks were fined many millions of dollars by their regulator, the US securities and exchange commission (SEC), for bent "research" and bogus recommendations from analysts. Morgan Stanley got the second largest fine: $125m.

Chairman Purcell wasn't too worried. He said publicly that investors didn't really care very much about the bank's conduct. For this casual response he was severely rebuked by the SEC chairman William Donaldson. "Your statements," said Donaldson, "reflect a troubling lack of contrition and lead me to wonder about Morgan Stanley's commitment to compliance with the letter and spirit of the law."

Back in Britain Morgan Stanley encountered no such hostility from the regulator. Although Sir Howard Davies could see that British subsidiaries of the erring American banks were committing the same offences, he decided to do… absolutely nothing about it. In a moving after-dinner speech, greatly appreciated by the wealthy audience, he stated his view that the best people to discipline the investment banks were, er, the investment bankers (*Eye* 1080). Just the sort of moderate, commonsense approach from a regulator that calls for instant promotion and enrichment by the investment banks.

PS: One of Sir Howard's first tasks at Morgan Stanley will be to investigate how, in December 2002, the bank managed to promote a big $314m bond issue by Soparfi, a Luxembourg company with a not altogether clean record as far its auditors were concerned. Soparfi is a subsidiary of an Italian food conglomerate with an oddly familiar name: Parmalat.

MMR

Search for a new vaccine

THE Irish government has awarded a leading Dublin virologist €700,000 (£484,000) to develop a new MMR vaccine which avoids the use of three live viruses.

The move comes as take-up of the triple jab in Ireland is falling to the same low levels as in the UK because of fears of a link between autism and bowel disease.

Professor Greg Atkins, who will lead a team at the Moyne Institute of Preventive Medicine at Trinity College, Dublin, is emphatic that there is no proven link between the MMR triple jab and autism; and he is equally emphatic that the risks of going without the jab far outweigh vaccination. But he does not rule out the possibility of risk to a very small number of children.

In a paper recently published in *Critical Reviews of Immunology*, he writes of the work of fellow Trinity College professor John O'Leary, who found measles at the sites of inflammation in the guts of children with autism. "These findings do not prove an association between this type of autism and measles vaccination: however an association between a small minority of autism cases and vaccination cannot be discounted at present." He said that while some had sought to refute a possible association between the measles component and autism on epidemiological grounds (not least Britain's health chief and ministers), it is unlikely that the studies published so far would have detected the small numbers involved.

While more work was needed to verify O'Leary's findings and their significance, what was clear was that there were known side effects, the most serious including encephalitis and meningitis. The measles component had been associated with suppressing the immune system and other research had suggested it may act as a triggering event in rare cases of multiple sclerosis.

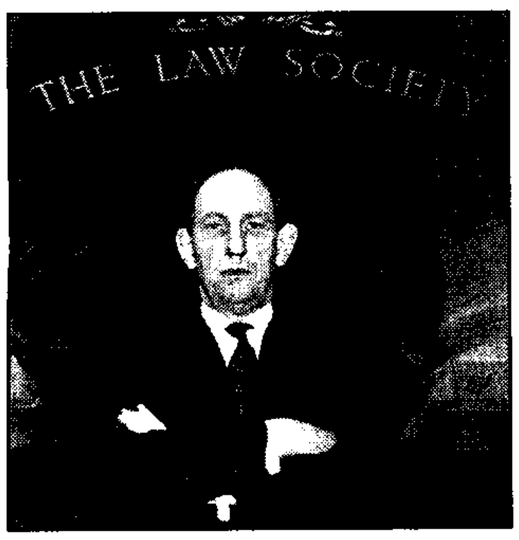
Much research has already taken place into new DNA-based vaccines, but these have not so far proved very effective in preventing disease. However, Atkins plans to use RNA, which makes up the genetic material of the virus itself, as part of a wider €2m research project into virus vaccines for both humans and animals.

The trouble for parents is that it will be years before such any vaccine is fully developed and tested. And the British government – "MMR is the safest way to vaccinate your children" – is still not prepared to allow single vaccines as an alternative to MMR while the controversy continues. Last week it emerged that as well as the payment incentive to doctors to keep up MMR vaccination numbers, MMR take-up rates will now form part of the "star ratings" performance for doctors and primary care trust in the NHS. Those with low take-up rates will jeopardise their three-star status and may miss out on government cash. Which will only fuel distrust further.

FORD DISPOSABLE?

MICHAEL FORD, the barrister who complains that he was sacked, abused, bankrupted and ruined by his former client, Exxon, the richest corporation in the world, has submitted a disturbing petition to the Privy Council.

The background to the Ford case, and his representation of Exxon affiliate companies whose Hong Kong power station exploded killing two people and injuring many others, was set out in detail in the *Eye* last summer (1082 and 1083). In his current petition, Ford alleges that the former president of the Law Society, Michael Napier (right), acted for him in proceedings against Exxon affiliate companies before the Privy Council in 1997 when Napier's firm, Irwin Mitchell, was also acting in a substantial action for Esso, which is part of Exxon.



Ford's petition describes his distress that his lawyers, advised by Napier, did not raise with the Privy Council, even when asked by the Privy Council registrar, the delicate matter which Ford regards as the key question: witness intimidation. He believes this failure may have led to the council's decision not to hear the case. Instead the case was shuffled off to the court of appeal in Hong Kong where, in the enforced absence of the bankrupt Mr Ford or any of his witnesses, it was thrown out after submissions by another barrister whose wife was a director of the Chinese-owned company that partly owned the power station with Exxon.

In conversation with Ford last year, Michael Napier let slip for the first time that Irwin Mitchell also worked for Esso (Exxon), but claimed this work did not coincide with his work for Ford. In a letter to a mutual friend, the famous American attorney Stuart Speiser, last 30 September, Napier wrote: "This firm is now retained by Esso under formal arrangements (post the case in the Privy Council)." But Ford's subsequent research suggests that Irwin Mitchell's work for Esso coincided almost exactly with his own Privy Council case.

For instance, on 5 February 1997, two months before Ford's case against Exxon affiliate companies was heard in the Privy Council, the court of appeal in London heard the case of Esso Petroleum Company v Milton, one among about a hundred similar cases involving many millions of pounds in which the oil company in England clashed ferociously with Esso licensees in service stations throughout the country. The documents plainly stated that Esso's QC was instructed by Irwin Mitchell of Sheffield, where Napier was senior partner. To remove any doubt, the *Eye* wrote to Michael Napier on 29 December as follows:

"Mr Ford was surprised to discover from you quite recently that your firm represented Esso in a big case involving (I think) garage franchisees at the same time as you were representing him pro bono in his case against Esso. He is worried not only about the possible conflict of interest here, but also that your advice to him, especially on the subject of witness intimidation by Esso, might have been influenced (or be seen to have been influenced) by that conflict. Could I therefore ask the following questions: 1. Exactly when did your firm first represent Esso in the franchisees' case? 2. Did that representation in any way overlap with your own representation of Michael Ford in his case against Esso? 3. If so, how do you explain the apparent conflict of interest in representing both parties? I understand that you may feel that any detailed discussion about the case might involve you in problems of client confidentiality but such problems need not arise if the only information required is the dates on which your firm represent Esso and Michael Ford."

Mr Napier replied on 6 January. "I am not able to discuss with you this firm's advice to Mr Ford nor the information you requested. My only response is that a number of assumptions in your enquiry are inaccurate and that throughout the time that Mr Ford was represented by this firm and Lord Thomas QC in the Privy Council he always received independent and impartial advice consistent with out professional obligations. Any suggestion to the contrary would be inaccurate."

The Privy Council has acknowledged Mr Ford's petition, though cannot yet say what it is going to do about it.

PS: In 2000 the Law Society launched a detailed investigation of their rules about conflicts of interest. The society's president at the time was Michael Napier.

CRASH COURSE

HOME secretary David Blunkett's plan for a levy on offenders to pay compensation to the victims of crime was reduced by the press to a single story: a £5 tax on the "victimless" crime of speeding.

This argument bypasses the fact that the levy applies to all manner of offences (such as yobbish behaviour when drunk); but more importantly ignores the 3,500 people who die on our roads every year and the 40,000 who suffer devastating injuries. Inappropriate speed is a factor in a third of road accidents. A motorist exceeding a 40mph speed limit by just 3mph presents the same fatality risk as a drink-driver, and road accidents are the main cause of acquired brain injury in children. Little wonder many children face long-term health problems because worried parents ban them from playing outside unsupervised, or cycling or walking to school.

Yet speeding has none of the taboo of drink-driving, prosecutions for which were reported just as contemptuously by the media a generation ago. Thankfully the government does not see things the same way. Ministers now propose to increase the maximum jail term for motorists who cause death by dangerous driving to 14 years, while earlier this year the sentencing advisory panel (which advises judges) said such drivers should face a short prison term for even a "momentary error of judgment".

Many drivers who kill, however, will be unaffected. According to road safety campaign group Roadpeace, a charge of causing death by dangerous driving tends only to happen where there is more than one fatality. Prosecutors often prefer to bring the lesser charge of careless driving.

Widower Roy Porter of Droitwich Spa has written repeatedly to the crown prosecution service (CPS) and attorney-general concerning the death of his wife, killed in a head-on crash near Stratford upon Avon. A car had veered on to Mrs Porter's side of the road, and she had no chance to avoid it. A witness who himself had narrowly escaped being struck by the vehicle said the driver was not even visible behind the wheel, while the car's speedometer was found to be stuck at 70mph after the crash.

A police investigator said the stuck speedometer was irrelevant and find no reason for the driver being on the wrong side of the road other than a "momentary loss of concentration". The driver, who had no memory of the accident, was fined £400 after admitting driving without due care and attention. Mr Porter believes a case could and should have been made for causing death by dangerous driving.

ETHICAL INVESTMENT

Cash in the pipeline

ANOTHER triumph of ethical investment from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the World Bank's International Finance Corporation.

Representatives of the two will travel to Azerbaijan on 3 February to sign over $250m in public money to support the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline running through Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey. The BTC is being created by an 11-member consortium of oil companies, led by BP, and will be capable of transporting a million barrels of crude oil a day from the Caspian Sea oil fields.

Meanwhile, last week the UK's Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD) decided to post-pone the planned signing of a $150m line of credit to support BTC (see last *Eye*).

Trade minister Mike O'Brien told the Commons last month that "ECGD's decision [to grant the credit] was made after a rigorous assess-ment of the risks associated with the project and a thorough review of the environmental, social and human rights impacts arising from the project."

Not that rigorous, it seems. Environmental and human rights organisations in nine different coun-tries, including the UK-based Friends of the Earth and the Kurdish Human Rights Project (KHRP), have compiled a dossier citing 173 violations of mandatory World Bank standards by the BTC con-sortium in the Turkish section of the pipeline alone. These include 48 failures to properly consult either local populations or the proper authorities in the countries along the route, 28 violations of the rules on resettlement, 29 on cultural heritage including potential destruction of archaeological sites, 10 on environmental assessment and 30 on ethnic minori-ties.

ECGD had said its support depended on extra conditions to be met, but everything looked set to be agreed. So has the ECGD now had an attack of conscience? Or could the cold feet have anything to do with a case due to come to court in Georgia this week, alleging that BP pressured the country's environment minister into approving the pipeline route through Georgia's main national park? An ECGD spokesman told the *Eye*: "They're still sort-ing out documentation. I don't think there's any-thing sinister going on."

Other concerns include the impact on the Kurdish minority populations who become even more vulnerable once displaced from their own land. KHRP still intends to fight the pipeline and is planning to take a challenge to the European court of human rights this year on behalf of the Kurds living in the region.

Breaches of the environmental rules include starting construction before the Turkish govern-ment had even had a chance to approve the flawed environmental impact assessment. Meanwhile any talk of consultation is surely a joke in a country where only last year a lawyer was charged with "overtly insulting the moral integrity of the govern-ment" for criticising the Ilisu Dam project.

As for the resettlement action plan, it was agreed by the International Finance Corporation before any census had been taken of fishing com-munities and before any consultation of those com-munities had taken place. Compensation packages are considered by the non-governmental organisa-tions (NGOs) to be inadequate for the level of lost income and extra expense of having to up sticks.

The US has been lobbying heavily for the BTC pipeline for years in the hope of improving security of supply rather than relying on the unstable Middle East, although with revolution in Georgia and recent bomb attacks in Turkey this dream must look shaky right now. Campaigners say the UK government had simply caved in to US pressure when development minister Hilary Benn voted at the World and European Banks last year in favour of the $250m loan to the project.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

ONCE again the treasury has been caught out – though this time not for long – in its ceaseless combat with the oh-so clever legal minds that offer protection for the multi-million bonuses of City fat cats from too much or any tax. The chancellor was forced to move quickly last week to slam the door on a tax avoidance scheme which threatened to cost many more than the millions it is suspected have already escaped his income tax net.

By no coincidence the popularity of the tax scheme paralleled the booming market in government bonds or gilts, a key part of Gordon's strategy for funding the ever widening budget deficit – a deficit in part increased by the lower tax take produced by avoidance schemes for the seriously rich.

The tax scheme, which was marketed through much of last year, was the latest variant on the "dividend stripping" game beloved of City operators for 50 years or more. As ever it relied on the difference between gilt prices with and without their guaranteed interest payment or between market and redemption values.

With the 2003 City bonus season expected to be more than worthwhile for the first time since 2000 – Goldman Sachs trader Driss Ben-Brahim is reportedly to be due £30m – banks were eager to find ways to shelter these payments from tax at 40 percent plus national insurance. In the past the dodges have involved payment in gold, wine, currencies and commodities. All now banned. Until last year employee benefit trusts (EBTs) were another popular device but these too were killed off – for now – in the last budget.

"Sorry – I can't touch my bonus for five years"

The unexpected death of EBTs clearly activated the imaginations of those accountants and barristers who spend their waking hours studying the tax laws for loopholes which the treasury never envisaged. So back came the latest wrinkle on "dividend stripping".

The clever trick was to manufacture losses from the purchase and sale of "strips" – traded securities that confer the right to receive an amount equal to either the annual interest or redemption value due on an individual bond. Interest and principal "strips" trade at a diminishing discount to their ultimate redemption value the closer that day comes. Any losses on such trades are allowable against tax for individuals or trusts.

The trust element is understood to have been key to the new scheme in converting capital losses into offsets against income tax. Normally capital losses cannot be set against income tax but there are exemptions and the "strips" scheme provided that piece of financial alchemy. With gilts there was a "deemed" disposal at the end of each tax year and the discount to redemption was taxed on a yearly basis. This created the opportunity to fabricate artificial tax losses – the aim of all good tax avoidance schemes.

The tax avoider or his employer would purchase "strips" at an agreed or purported market price but then dispose of them almost immediately afterwards by way of granting an option at an artificially low price. That "loss" was then balanced by a non-taxable premium paid by the purchaser of the option. A version of the matching bargains or "straddles" so beloved by tax scheme architects to ensure that only the tax man loses.

This scheme is reckoned to have sold very well in the run up to Christmas – which is when most City bonuses are decided – at a time when sales of gilts were running at record levels, thereby ensuring a lively market in "strips". Net purchases of gilts by institutions almost doubled to £9bn in the third quarter last year. In the first quarter it was just £2.4bn.

In order for the schemes to work huge amounts of "strips" would need to have been bought and this would have been done by the banks paying the bonuses, presumably through the trusts. What is certain is that the scheme was so aggressive – abusive in other words – and so popular that the Inland Revenue decided it had to act pronto and not as usual wait for the budget to close the "strips" loophole. So last week it changed the rules specifically to kill of the "strips" scheme with immediate effect. This has been done by imposing genuine market value as the determinant of the purchase and sale prices and disallowing losses on sales real or deemed. The suspicion was that with such esoteric financial instruments as "strips" some very funny valuations were being used.

But of course that still leaves those lucky bonus recipients who have already passed through the "strips" loophole. They are likely to come under attack under the general anti-avoidance provisions and *Ramsay* and *Furniss v Dawson* principles that any artificial arrangement entered into purely for the avoidance of tax will not be allowed.

Meanwhile, the scheme is dead, long live the scheme. Word is that new versions of the employee benefit trust are being marketed with legal opinions which say they get round last year's supposed ban.

TAX and how not to pay it is also behind the injunction the phoney pharaoh Mohamed Fayed obtained two weeks ago to temporarily prevent a BBC Money Programme examination of his now cancelled highly favourable deal with the Inland Revenue. This saw him pay a fraction of the tax he should have paid over a 15-year period from his purchase of Harrods in 1985.

Fayed is fighting a ruling by the Scottish courts last year that the Revenue should never have entered into the fixed payment agreements it accepted under which Fayed and his brothers paid an agreed amount every year in income tax but provided no details of their actual income. Fayed objects to claims being made in the BBC programme such as that he should have been paying £6m a year in tax rather than a maximum £240,000 for the entire family.

The Revenue entered into the first of these one-sided deals in 1985 after the only meaningful but still incomplete examination of the Fayed finances.

The Revenue decided Fayed and his brothers must pay UK tax. Because he was born in Egypt Mohamed Fayed could take advantage of the "non-dom" rule whereby the Fayeds were only taxed on income brought into the UK. Capital remittances are tax free unless it can be proved that they are disguised income. But the headaches involved for the taxman meant the Revenue was too willing to take the easy way out and accept what the rumbled Fayed offered.

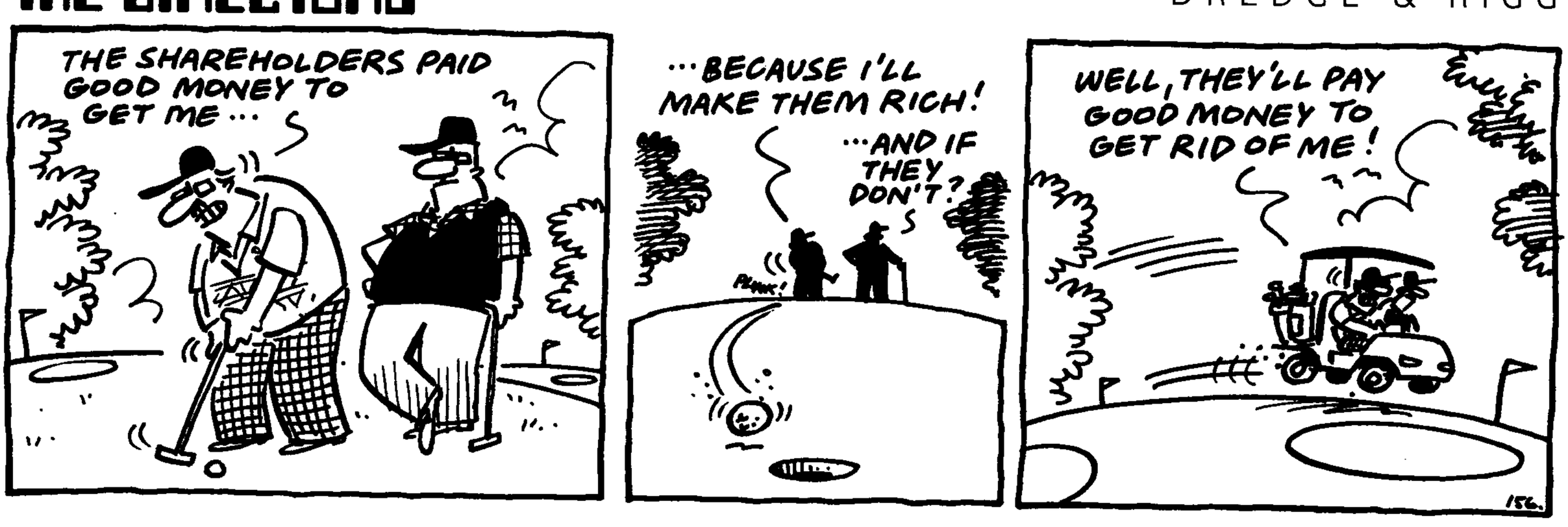
Fayed had brought in an estimated £277m of family money to buy Harrods. He had also been living in Britain since the 1960s either in Park Lane flats or from 1970 in a Surrey estate and Scottish castle although he claimed to be resident in Dubai. At that time availability of a UK home made even "non-doms" taxable on their UK income. That rule has since gone.

In 1985 the Revenue agreed a deal whereby Momo, his two brothers plus son Dodi agreed they owed collectively £2.55m for the previous 13 years – at £637,000 each, a snip for Momo in particular. And from 1985-86 they would pay a total of an inflation indexed £150,000 a year. Another bargain. Just how much Mohamed Fayed was remitting back into the UK for his own use the Revenue did not know and did not ask.

That was until 1990 after publication of the pharaoh's evidence to the Department of Timidity & Inaction's inspectors investigating the Harrods takeover disclosed the existence of Royal Bank of Scotland accounts used to make the purchase. These accounts had not been disclosed to the Revenue in 1985. Not surprisingly the Revenue believed they had been conned and set aside the 1985 deal.

Fayed's lawyers blamed the Midland Bank for providing conveniently inaccurate information. It was admitted that considerably larger sums had been remitted from Swiss accounts. No personal money had come through the RBS, it was claimed but never proved.

Desperate to get the Revenue off his back, Fayed proposed another deal. They would pay the Revenue £31.1m but provide no information about

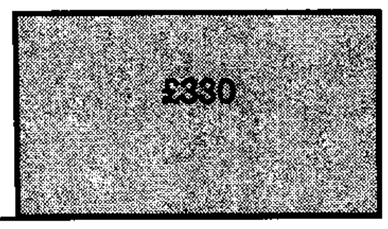

THE DIRECTORS
DREDGE & RIGG
THE SHAREHOLDERS PAID GOOD MONEY TO GET ME ...
... BECAUSE I'LL MAKE THEM RICH!
... AND IF THEY DON'T?
PLINK!
WELL, THEY'LL PAY GOOD MONEY TO GET RID OF ME!
156.

Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

Branson Pickle

Value of £100 invested five years ago in...



...Sir Richard Branson's low-cost airline **Virgin Express**

...Rival **Ryanair**

just what remittances and benefits had been so it was impossible to establish a realistic assessment of particularly Mo's true tax liability. And although this amounted to a bill of some £6m a year from 1985, remarkably the Revenue accepted a deal to pay *£200,000* a year for the next five years if no questions were asked about him, his brother Ali, who anyway was moving to the US and so became non-resident, or Dodi. This payment increasingly represented Momo's tax bill.

Fayed's non-domicile position was also becoming more questionable by the Revenue. Although he had not opted for the UK as a domicile of choice, he had lived here continuously for more than 20 years and was seeking British citizenship. If he was deemed to have a UK tax domicile – which can be done for foreigners in certain circumstances – then his world wide income would then be taxable.

From 1995 Fayed offshore vehicles began to receive ever larger dividends from Harrods totalling by last year £270m. Another more than £60m has been paid to offshore companies controlled by Fayed interests where the pharaoh could be deemed to be a shadow director. In addition, more than £120m has been remitted into the UK by Fayed and sunk into Fulham FC, *Punch* and Liberty Radio.

Despite this, in 1997 the Revenue renewed a deal with Fayed, this time to pay just £240,000 a year for five years. This was just the original £150,000 from 1985 plus inflation. It assumed Mohamed Fayed's UK taxable income, perks and remittances were merely £600,000, as by then both of his brothers were non-resident and Dodi was dead.

That was shown for the nonsense it was in 1999 when Fayed was said during the libel trial with former Tory MP Neil Hamilton to be drawing £120,000 *a week* in cash. At last the Revenue realised that the £1.7m it had collected since 1990 had to be a fraction of what he owed given the money poured into Fulham plus his far from phoney pharaonic lifestyle with offshore-owned homes, payment of legal and other expenses and the access to cash and drafts from the Harrods bank. In 2000 it cancelled the £240,000 a year agreement and demanded Fayed fill in tax returns like everyone else.

The Revenue is now crawling over Fayed's affairs which is why he has decamped to Switzerland. Just how much tax he should have paid since 1990 only Fayed's advisers know. Certainly it is arguable that all the £100m-plus pumped into Fulham, *Punch* etc should be taxable at 40 percent as it must mostly have come from the Harrods dividends and so was income. But that £40m ignores the lifestyle benefits and the large amounts paid to offshore companies under Fayed's control for UK assets plus the rents and sale proceeds from the sale of UK properties.

What is certain is that the Revenue failed to treat Fayed like any other taxpayer and insist on full information about his income and spending. He provided no details of his remittances from 1985. As a result, from 1985 the Revenue was seriously short-changed. What they will do to collect the money remains to be seen. But even though he is now non-resident that does not mean Fayed is beyond the Revenue's reach – especially if he wants to continue to visit Britain and Fulham.

'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 253

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 30 January 2004.

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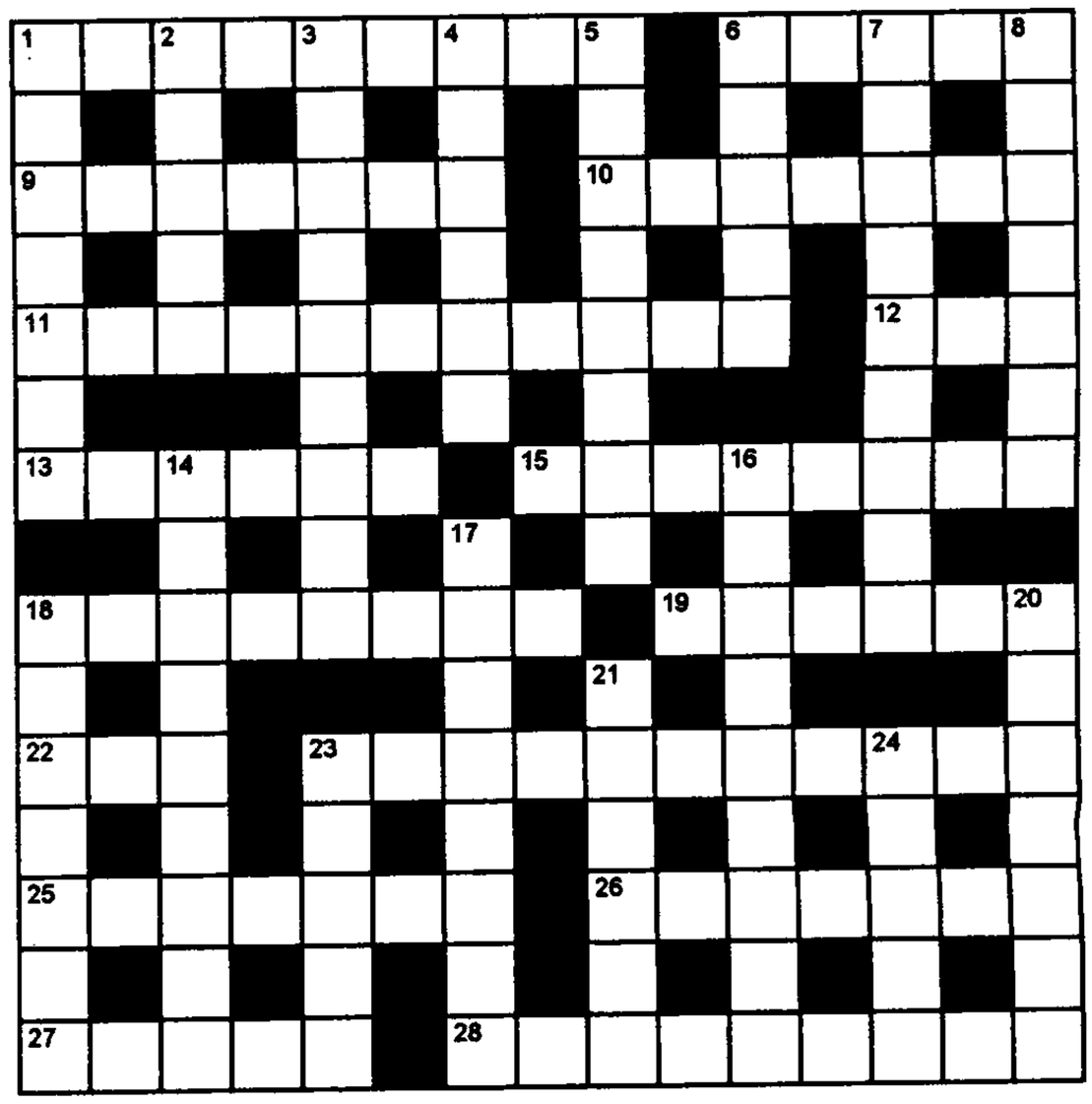


ACROSS

1 Pissed off Duke and restraining doctor (4,5)
6 Posh associate of Burns
9 Bloke acquiring new car's taking the piss (7)
10 Brenda's squeezed by new heartthrob, a bit like Mr Bean (7)
11 Bush: he must get prepared, without Blair finally, for summary dismissal (3,4,4)
12 Unwelcome winter visitor's "Eff you" sounds about opposite of right (3)
13 Teletubby to confess to "Moss activity" (6)
15 Ignore Straw's fishy jumper (8)
18 Top level fallout when fop drops last bit of neckwear (8)
19 Shorts accepted by defenders (6)
22 Virgin's said to convey African migrant (3)
23 When to devote yourself to the little horrors of *Property Hour*? (7,4)
25 Get erect when the judge enters? (7)
26 Gives one pain, revealing Hamlet possibly is on drink (5,2)
27 Around America, number two has no time for a snack (5)
28 Pairs on show after they've taken the plunge (9)

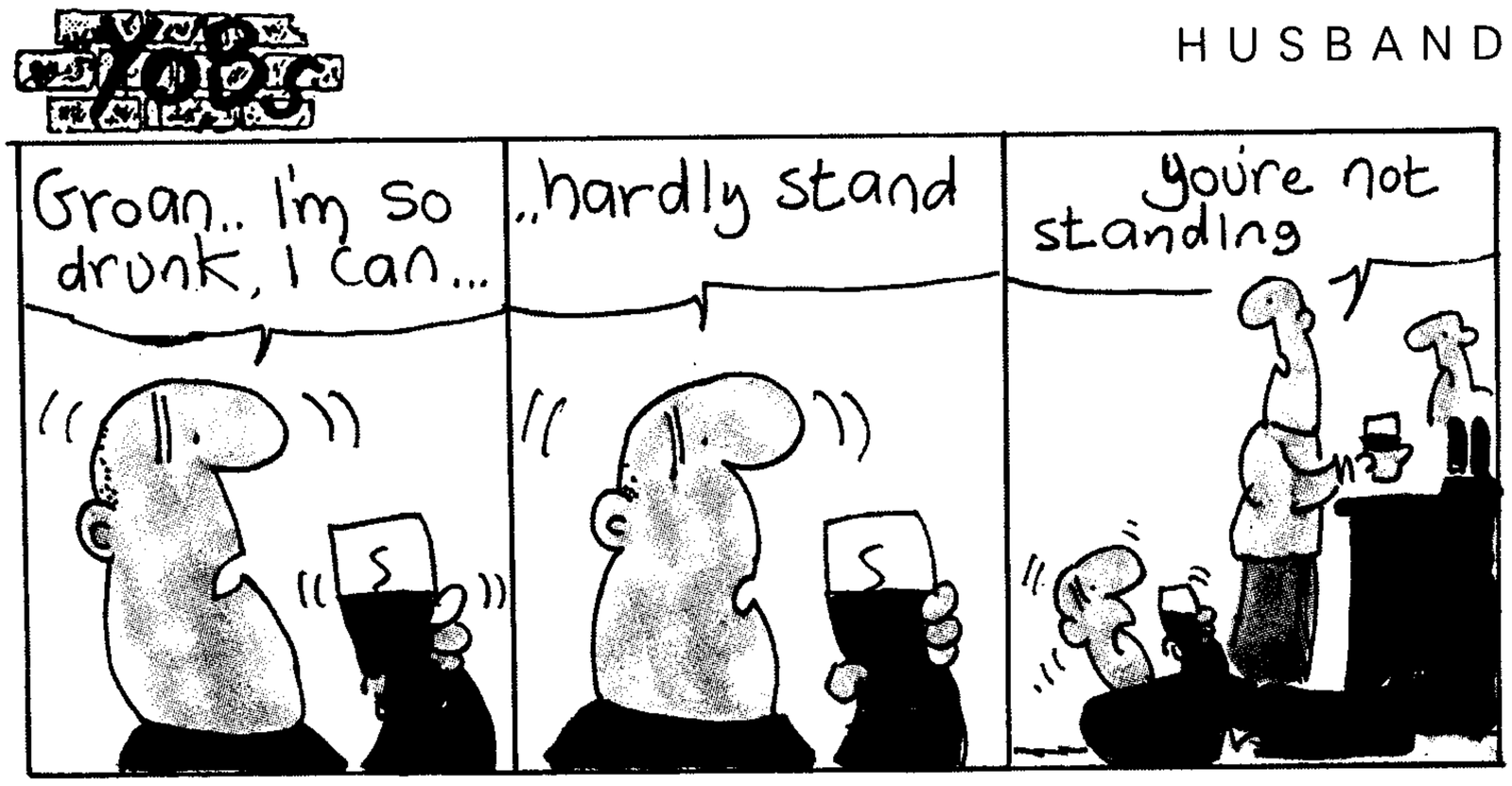
DOWN

1 Sort of PC suitable for office workers at it? (7)
2 Grant's one vice: ditching Divine initially (5)
3 Party errand boy grabs one bunk (2,1,6)
4 Reveal Kofi's lot as being constrained by Mark (6)
5 State of Livingstone fold at start of year (8)
6 Labour result – ex-Beeb Blair advisor gets hard on (5)
7 Richard has strong card? That's a bit steep! (5,4)
8 Objectionable type has crap after school (7)
14 Blazing images of tabloid tits about right? (9)
16 Houses split by this Tory, say, law amendment (and Liberal) (5,4)
17 Fond of an orgy occasionally (3,3,2)
18 Trunks emptied out for football managers' protection (7)
20 Former pop group's sound: featureless and seemingly going on forever? (7)
21 Projected life of one not fussy sexually, related to *Eye*, *Time Out* (6)
23 Queen gets two points dropped from Aussie constitution in appearance only (5)
24 Mad cow disease caught by trendy playwright (5)

Crossword 252 winner: NEIL DURY

ACROSS: 8 Saudi 9 Yachtsman 10/15D/25 Special relationship 12 Labour Party 15 Right 16 Unwed 20/11 Los Angeles 22/14 Rhode Island Red 24 Trussed 26 Viruses 27 Out with it 28 Loopy.

DOWN: 1 Superbug 2 Filibuster 3 Cyclops 4 Eclairs 5 Stag 6 Smiler 7 One-sided 8 Sisal 13 Yours truly 17 Weak spot 18 Doodahs 19 Heave to 21 Squits 23 Dishy.



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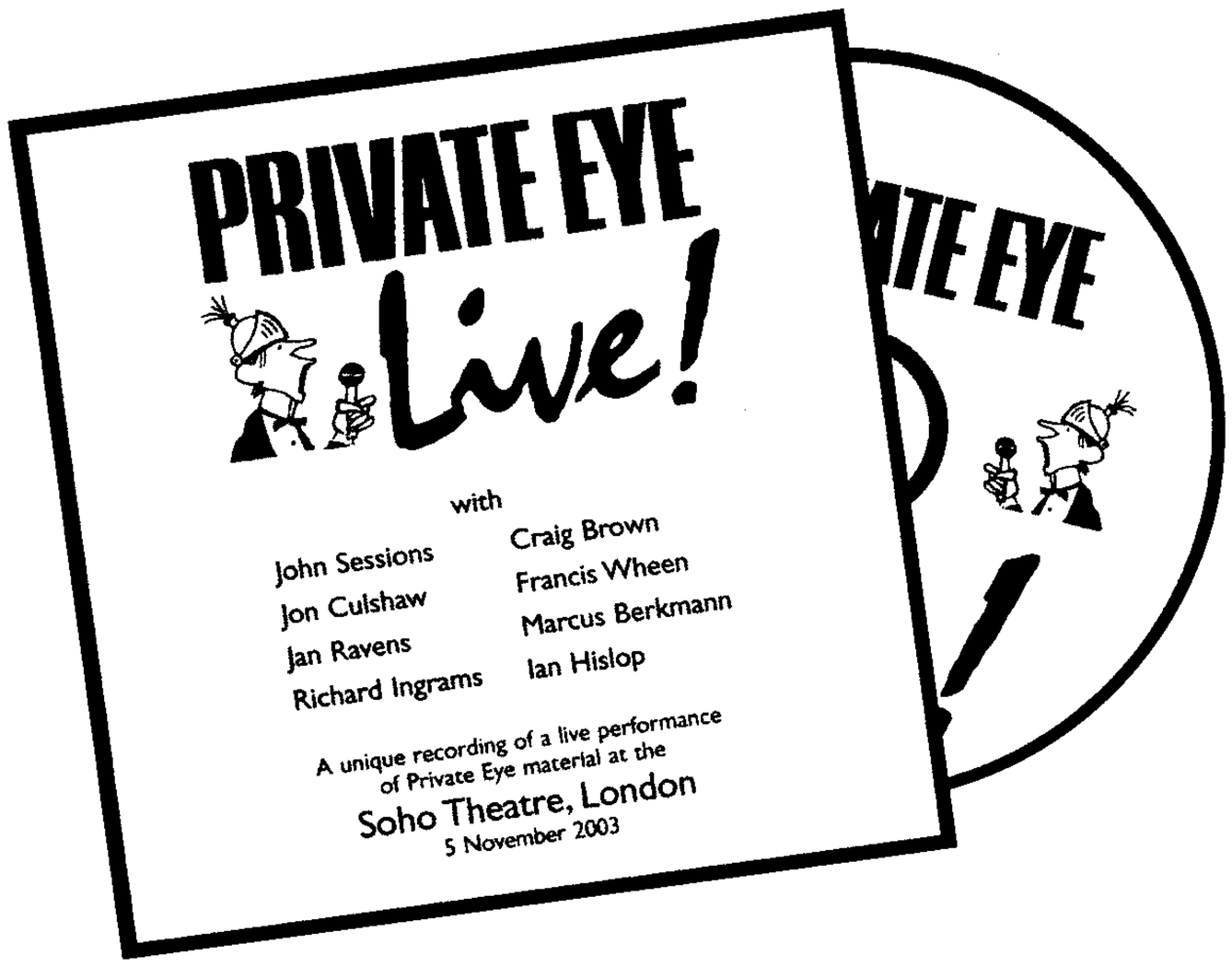

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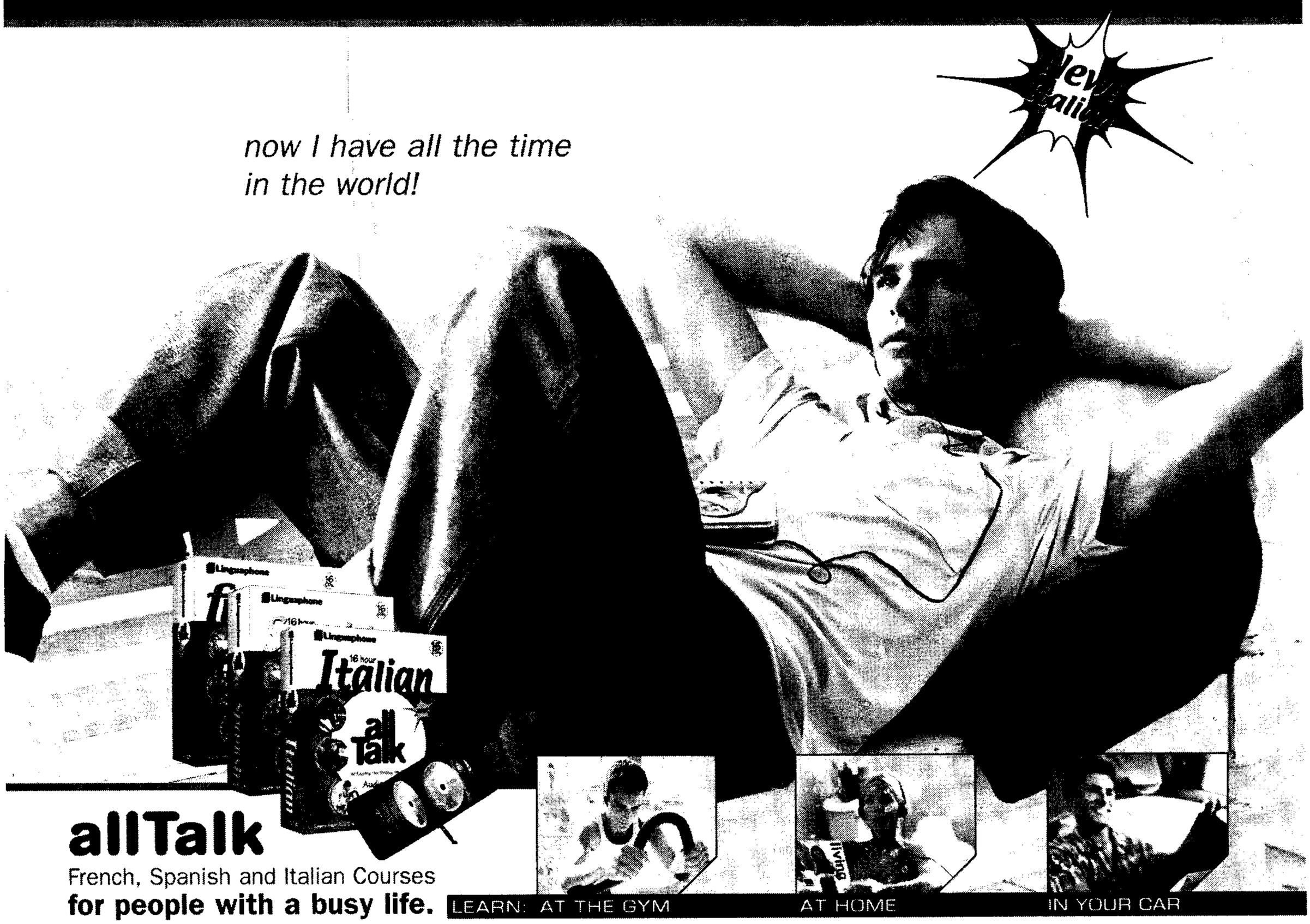
I never had the time to learn a new language...



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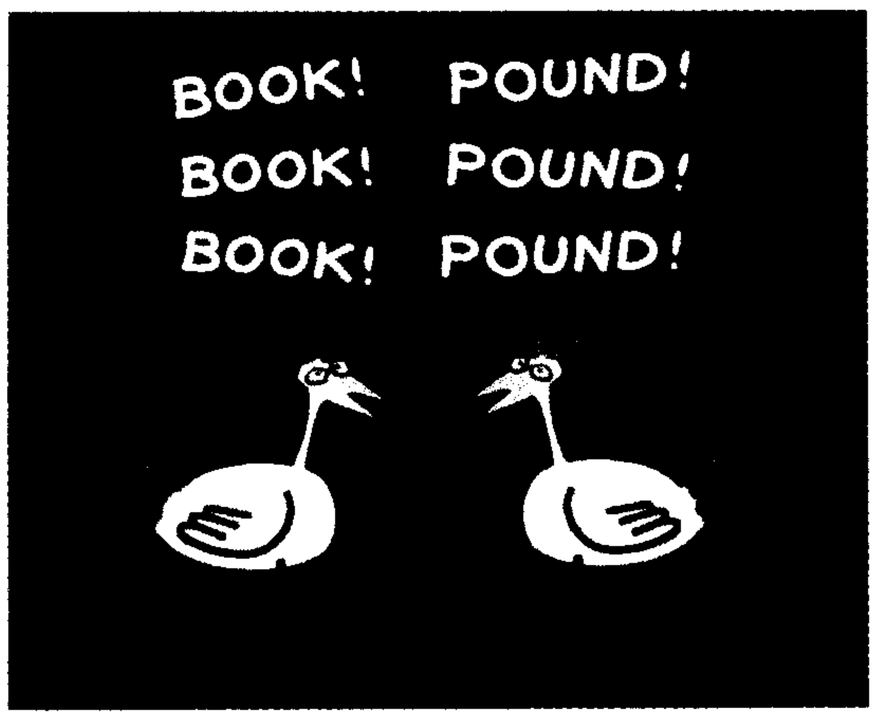

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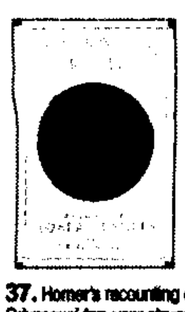

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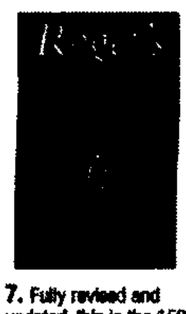

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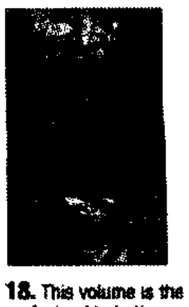

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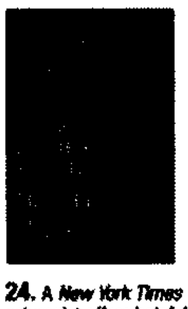

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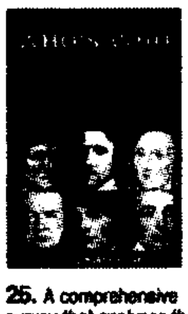

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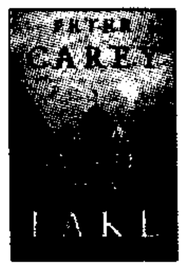

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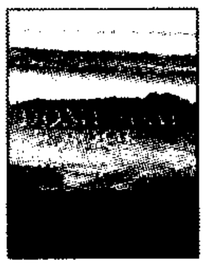

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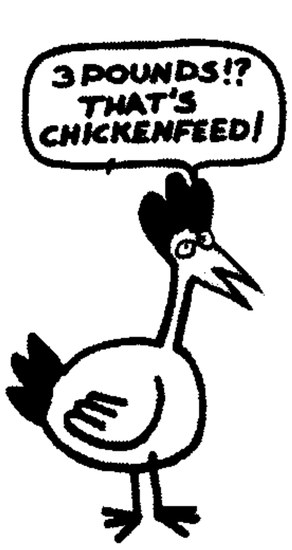

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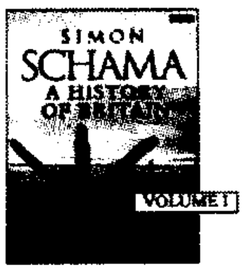

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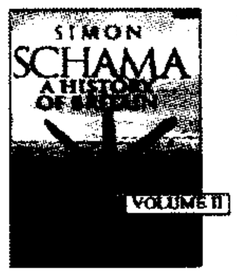

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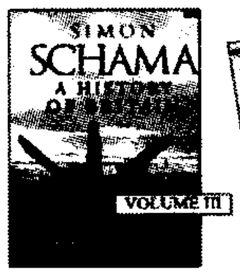

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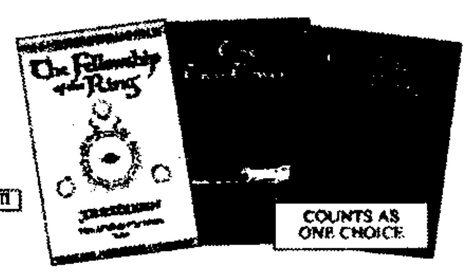

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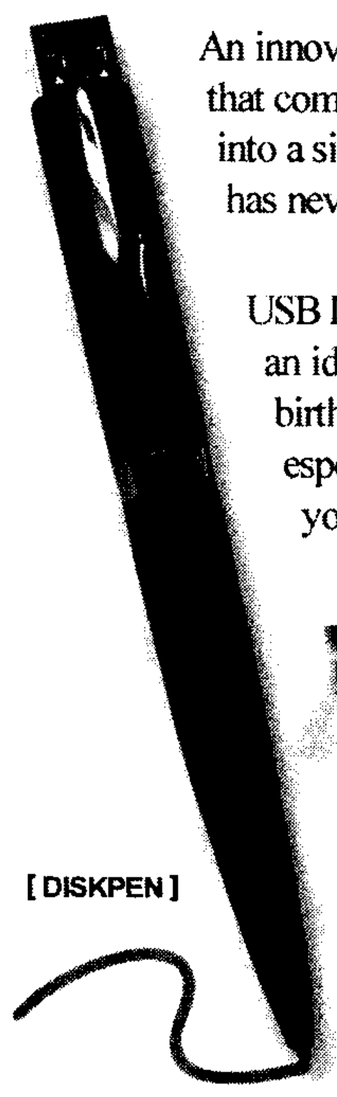

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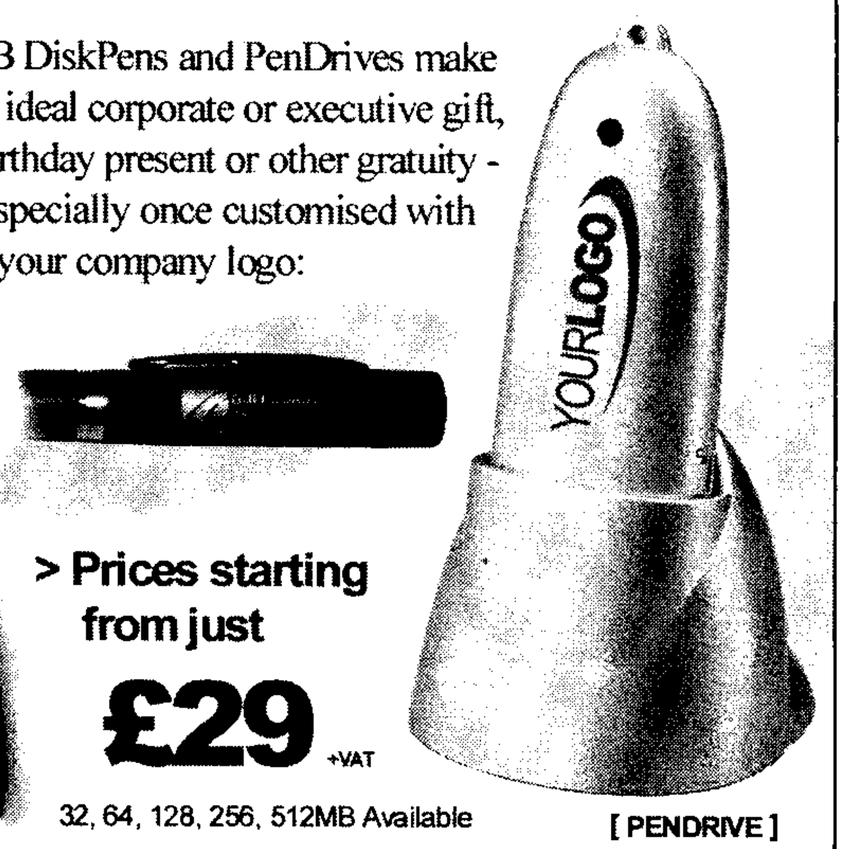

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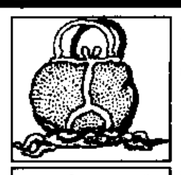

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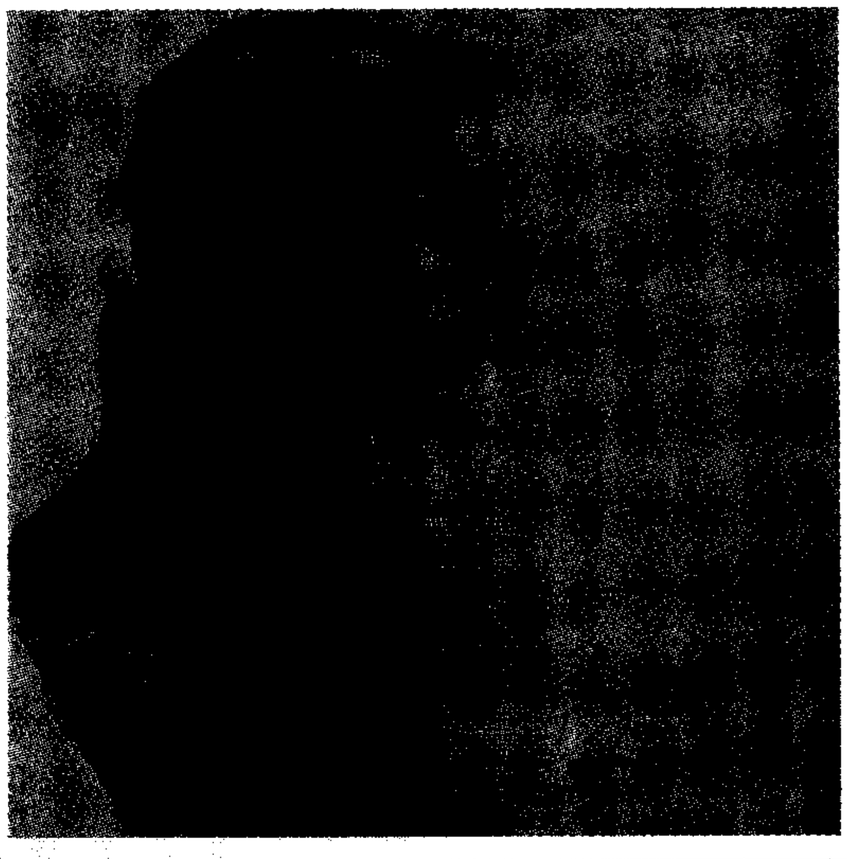

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CELLO: Talented young woman, suddenly without instrument (funding withdrawn), in urgent need. Repy Box 78974

GIFTED GIRL, (29), requires funding to produce magical children's animations. Any help appreciated. Barclays 20-27-91 Acount: 70823732. Thank you

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PLEASE HELP ME out of hellish situation. Barclays 20-13-42 A/N 70183059

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WRITER, £20,000 IN DEBT and paying work just cancelled. No social safety net and worried sick about eviction. All help deeply appreciated. Reply Box 79634

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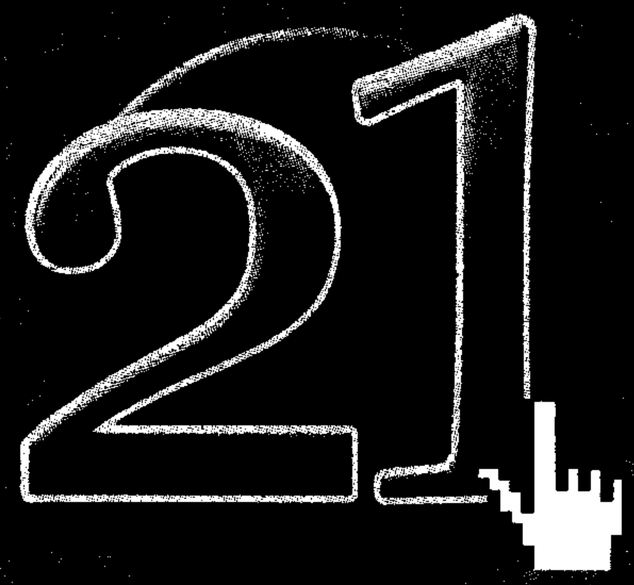

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